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**HOLY MARY: MOTHER OF GOD.**

Behold, from the depths of a holy womb, that of the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary, the Son of God was born.

Published by Edward Dunigan, New-York.



GOD AND I;

OR,

A WEEK'S SPIRITUAL RETREAT,

CONTAINING

SUITABLE MEDITATIONS

FOR

CHRISTIANS IN EVERY STATE OF LIFE.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF

PERE BERTHIER.

BY

THE RT. REV. WILLIAM WALSH,

BISHOP OF HALIFAX.

"O how I have loved thy law, O Lord! it is my meditation all the day."—

Psalm cxviii. 97.

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DEDICATION.

TO THE  
MOST HOLY AND EVER BLESSED  
VIRGIN MARY,  
THE MOTHER OF GOD,  
AND SUBLIME MODEL OF A CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE,

*All whose glory is from within :*

WHO FAITHFULLY TREASURED UP AND PONDERED IN HER HEART,  
EVERY THING SHE HEARD CONCERNING HER DIVINE SON.



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# G O D A N D I ,

## A R E T R E A T .

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### FIRST MEDITATION.

GOD, WHO SPEAKS TO ME : I, WHO LISTEN TO  
HIM.

“ I will listen to what the Lord God shall say in me : for he will speak peace unto his people.”  
Psalm lxxxiv. 9.

I COMMENCE these holy exercises in this declaration of the prophet : *I will hear what the Lord shall say in me : I will hear, because he will speak to me of peace.*

*The Lord speaks to me*—first reflection.  
*I ought to hear him*—second reflection.  
*If I hear him, he will speak peace unto me*—third reflection, and subject of my first exercise.

Lord, I repeat in thy presence, the prayer of the Prophet Samuel : *Speak, thy servant*

*heareth* :\*—speak to the bottom of my heart—speak with that powerful voice whose characters have been thus traced by the holy king :

*The voice of the Lord is upon the waters.*

*The voice of the Lord is in power.*

*The voice of the Lord in magnificence.*

*The voice of the Lord, that breaketh the Cedars of Libanus.*

*The voice of the Lord, that disperseth lightnings.*

*The voice of the Lord, that shaketh the desert.*

*The voice of the Lord, that prepareth the stags for their course ! †*

Ah ! great God ! I find in those seven characters the efficacy of thy word performing miracles of grace by the seven sacraments of the new covenant. I invoke this holy word ; I prepare myself to hear it. Oh ! that it may not be unfruitful in me ! May it penetrate to the inmost recesses of my soul ! May it be a *dis-*

\* 1 Kings iii. 10.

† Psalm xxviii.

*cerner of my most secret thoughts!* as thy great Apostle expresses it. May it teach me to know thee, and teach me to know myself; for the object of this Retreat is, GOD AND I, according to the method with which thou hast inspired me, under the direction of a holy soul! *Our Father. Hail Mary.*

## FIRST REFLECTION.

### GOD SPEAKS TO ME.

Is it possible, O my God! that *thou*, the immortal King of all ages, should condescend to speak to *me*? And how dost thou speak to me? By the grand spectacle of this universe—by the establishment of thy Church—by the lessons that are diffused through thy Holy Scriptures—by the Cross of Jesus Christ thy Son—by the examples of thy saints—by all the events of life—by death itself, that inexorable power, which ravages the world, and consigns all men to the silence of the tomb.

Behold, then, my God! seven voices, seven characters of thy Word. Enlighten me on those grand subjects, which alone will be sufficient to engage all my attention during these holy exercises.

*Thou speakest to me by the spectacle of this universe.* Thou dost inform me that the heavens, the earth, and all that they contain, are the work of thy hands—that by only one word thou hast drawn all these things out of nothing—that if thou didst cease to preserve them, they would fall into the abyss—that everything of beauty, health, or delight, which they afford me, is the effect of thy goodness for me. This word is as ancient as the world; it strikes the senses of all men. *There is no people,* cries out the holy king, *to whom the language of the heavens is unknown;*\* but how few are they who discover the truth which this powerful voice proclaims! And am I not of the number

\* Ps. xviii. 4. 5.

of those ingrates who enjoy thy benefits without rendering thee any acknowledgments? I am in the midst of the light, and yet I do not perceive thee, O divine Author of my life! I do not adore thee, O supreme Majesty! I do not bless thee, O infinite Wisdom! I do not fear the abuse of thy gifts, O immutable Justice!

*Thou speakest to me by the establishment of thy Church.* This, O Lord, is the masterpiece of thy mercy. Sin had inundated the world, the corruption had spread from pole to pole, altars were raised to all the monsters in hell; thou alone, O Eternal Beauty!—thou wert almost without worship, and without adorers. But thou didst at length display the force of thine arm; thou didst make thyself known through thy only Son, the unchangeable object of thy regards; thou didst prepare for thyself a people of faithful adorers. The earth has changed its face—the idols have been thrown down—the infamous sacrifices have ceased—the oracles of false-

hood have been reduced to silence. Thy Church, born upon Calvary, and reared in the midst of trials and sufferings, has opened her bosom to the most barbarous nations. Prophecies, miracles, the excellence of her moral code, the heroism of her virtues, all the marks of truth, and majesty, and sanctity, have made known this holy spouse of the Incarnate Word. She has endured for eighteen centuries in defiance of all the storms that assailed her; she still subsists, and she teaches me, not by prescribing me the study of philosophy, but by commanding me to believe, and be obedient to her. This tender and beneficent mother unceasingly speaks to me, in thy name, O my God! She speaks to me by her pastors, by her public worship, by her holy assemblies, by the history of her saints, above all, by her perpetuity, her universality, her unity and uniformity. What a voice, O God of mercy! how sweet and insinuating, as well as forcible and brilliant! Shall I not

be most culpable if I do not attend to the lessons of this mother of the faithful, this spouse of the God of truth ?

*Thou speakest to me by thy Holy Scriptures, that immense treasure that is deposited in the bosom of thy Church. The Apostle, thy faithful interpreter, assures me that those books, divinely inspired, are profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct in justice, that the man of God may be perfect, furnished unto every good work.\**

It does not follow from hence, O Lord, that all thy children, my brethren in Christ Jesus, should scrutinize the mysteries that are concealed in those divine works. The administration of this treasure is confided to those who hold the first places in thy house. I too, am permitted to drink at this source of life, but with suitable obedience and docility. Thou hast not permitted me hitherto to disturb or turn aside the salutary waters that flow from thence : and yet, my God, the voice of thy Holy

\* 2 Tim. iii. 16.

Scriptures has not produced in me those great effects of which thy Apostle speaks. It ought to have been my *consolation*, it ought to have strengthened *my hope*, and supported me in the way of salvation. This book contains the origin of the world, and I ought to read in it what I am, and for what purpose I exist. It contains the laws, the history, the revolutions of the only people who preserved the principles of truth for four thousand years. It contains the oracles and figures which announced the Messiah, with all his characters, and the Christian Church with all its privileges. It contains the actions, words, and promises of Jesus Christ—his institutions and sufferings—everything that his Apostles have taught the world after his ascension, every advice that they have given the first faithful, and, in their person, to all mankind. What consequences have I drawn from such and so many instructions and examples? Should I not fear, O my God, lest this sacred volume may be



one day opened for my condemnation! God of mercy, do not permit this misfortune to befall me! O that I may learn, like Augustine, to love thee in thy holy books, and by means of thy Holy Scriptures! May I seek in them thy will, and may I reduce it to practice, with all the zeal of the most ardent charity!

*Thou speakest to me by the Cross of Jesus Christ; that cross, the sound of which, according to the expression of thy Apostle, is a folly to those who perish, and the power of God to those who are saved;—that cross, to which my Redeemer has fastened the decree of my condemnation after having entirely effaced it;\**—that cross which formed all the wisdom of Paul, and all the glory of his apostleship;—that cross, which distinguishes the true faithful from the partisans of the world;—that cross, which will appear at the last day, to the confusion of the wicked, and the consolation of the just. O God, immolated for

\* Coloss. ii. 14.

the sins of the world, what does not this cross preach to me ! I behold it, said St. Leo, exposed to the eyes of all mankind, as *the Altar of the entire world*.\* It is on this altar, then, my God, that I ought to sacrifice, not legal victims, but my own heart, my entire self. Sublime lesson as I could select for meditation upon in this Retreat, and whose fruit should be the spirit of sacrifice, in union with the great sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

*Thou speakest to me by the examples of thy Saints ;* and this voice has everything in it that ought to affect me. I am fired with emulation when I behold men like myself undertaking great exploits, or acquiring a reputation by their industry, generosity, or perseverance. I believe, my God, that it is self-love excites and urges me on these occasions. I wish to move beyond the sphere of my existence : I aspire to a station which may distinguish me from the vulgar. Oh abuse of my de-

\* Sermon 8 on the Passion.

sires, error of my thoughts and my affections ! Thy throne, O Lord, is surrounded by a multitude of excellent men, who reign in glory with thee. They *have been* what I *am*. They have fought with courage ; they have obtained signal victories over the world, the devil, and their passions. These are the heroes whom thou proposest for my imitation. ‘What !’ thou sayest to me, ‘canst not thou accomplish what children, weak and delicate virgins, uncultivated and illiterate men, and persons borne down by the weight of their years and infirmities have achieved ? Is it that I do not afford thee the same assistance which they had ? Is thy weakness unknown to me, or are not thy enemies mine also ? And have I not power enough to overcome them ?’

This, O Lord, was the language thou didst address to Augustine,\* and after some resistance, he entered into the path that was trodden by the Saints, and cried

\* Confessions viii. xi.

out with thy Prophet, *Thou hast broken my chains, and I will sacrifice to thee a victim of praise.\** This holy liberty I desire ; I have sought it for a long time, and I ask it of thee, O my God, through the blood of Jesus Christ, and the intercession of thy holy friends.

*Thou speakest to me by all the occurrences of life ;* by the calamities of the world, by the revolutions of states and societies, by the fall of the great and their grandeur, by the folly of pretensions, by the senseless tyranny of the passions, by the frivolity of sciences, by the inconstancy of friendships, by the tedium of conversations, by the malignity of tongues, by the duplicity of hearts, by the blindness of spirits, by the hypocrisy of characters. This, O my God, is but a mere draught of the great portrait of the world, which has been so long exposed before my eyes, and which is so proper to instruct me. Thou didst exhibit it to me in good time, in or-

\* Psalm cxv. 16.

der to counteract the desire which would attract me to the world. Thou hast persuaded me *that this entire world is under the power of the evil spirit.*\* Nevertheless, O Lord, I am still weak: my heart does not invariably follow the lights which thou discloseth to my spirit. Accomplish, therefore, thy work; attach me for ever to thy eternal beauty, O thou in whose presence the world passeth away as a shadow, fadeth as a flower, and is scattered as a cloud of smoke!

*Thou speakest to me by death,* O unchangeable and essential Life! and it is this voice which terrifies men, because they know not how to estimate the goods of which it should put them in possession. Death is terrible to the ambitious, who descend in a moment from the importance of grandeur to the obscurity of the tomb; it is terrible to the miser, who, out of all his goods is left but a little dust to cover his remains; it is terrible to the volup-

\* 1 John v. 19.

tuary, who meets it with the wreck of a life that has been cut short and disgraced by his pleasures ; it is terrible, O my God ! to all those who have neither known thee, nor loved thee. They enter into a region where they have neither friends nor protectors. This is the region of eternity, and they have been the slaves of time ; it is the region of spirits, and the gratification of their senses has been their only study ; it is the region of virtues, and they have acquired but the art of committing crime ; it is the country of the living, and they have been like dead men, without returning to thee, O God, the source and principle of life—without reflecting on their end, without considering that the tomb is the winding-sheet in which thou wrappest up for ever the vanities of the earth. But, sweet and agreeable, O Lord, is this voice of death to him who has the knowledge of himself, who reflects on the delightful converse he has enjoyed with thee, who is captivated with the beauties

of thy kingdom ! He knows that his body, formed from the slime of the earth, must return to its first origin ; but he is at the same time convinced, that his soul, which has been created after thy image, O immortal God ! will mount up to thee. He awaits this happy moment ;—he cries out, ‘ O death, who releasest man from captivity, who crownest all his cares, his labors, and his virtues, who dost terminate all his sufferings, and through whom the reign of true blessedness begins ! when wilt thou come to break my chains, and to re-unite me to the only object of my love ?

## SECOND REFLECTION.

SINCE GOD SPEAKS TO ME, I OUGHT TO HEAR HIM.

IN vain, O Lord, dost thou address me, under so many different forms, if I do not hear thee. But at what time should I hear thee ? As I conceive, at the time of

prayer, and at the Holy Communion. And in what manner should I hear thee? It seems to me that it is in silence, with simplicity, with a full and perfect resolution to accomplish thy will.

I ought to hear thee in prayer; and what is prayer but an elevation of my spirit towards thee, and the union of my will with thine? I ought to meditate on the instructions thou deliverest me by the display of nature, by the establishment of thy Church, by the lessons diffused through thy Holy Scriptures, by the cross of Jesus Christ thy Son, by the examples of thy Saints, by the events of this mortal life, by death and its awful consequences. I ought to receive the affections with which thou inspirest me, in meditating on these important subjects. From hence, I should resolve to effect an entire reformation of my life, and to regulate by the direction of thy grace, the plan of my conversion. I am aware, O Lord, that none of thy Saints has arrived either to holiness or



glory without the practice of prayer. I am also aware, that this practice is not difficult, for it merely transfers my thoughts to those objects that are most interesting to me, and permits my soul to cherish those affections that are most agreeable to me: it is not difficult, for it tends to make me love thee, bless thee, and improve my knowledge of thy divine attributes. I am, in the mean time, before thee *as earth without water* ;\* created objects present themselves to dissipate my spirit, and close my heart against the impressions of thy love. From whence could this arise, if not from my habitual dissipation, from my earthly inclinations, from my restless and rebellious passions ?

I have resolved on acquiring in this Retreat the true practice of prayer, of forming the habit of entering with facility on the meditation of holy truths. This work will be the effect of thy grace, and I ask it of thee, O my God, through the merits

\* Ps. cxlii. 6.

and intercession of all the contemplative Saints, but particularly of the Queen of Saints, who *treasured up in her heart* all that she had heard concerning Jesus Christ, her Son.\* I know, likewise, my God, that I ought to hear thee in the Holy Communion. This is a natural consequence of my faith, in this great mystery. Thou art then within me, in order to bestow me life, and to teach me to have the same existence as thyself. Fire is not communicated without heat, and warmth. Why then am I so cold and indifferent during those moments in which thou dwellest within me? Alas! the reason is evident: I do not hear thee: I do not say to thee like the Prince of the Apostles, *Lord, to whom shall we go, thou hast the words of eternal life.*† I am, O Lord, no enthusiast, nor am I prejudiced in favor of my dispositions; I have rather to reproach myself for my extreme timidity in thy presence, and for that fear which always accompa-

\* Luke ii. 51.

† John vi. 69.

nies me when I approach thy sacred Banquet; nevertheless, I venture to assure thee, that never do I find myself in the state of a soul that listens to thee, that permits thee to speak to the heart everything thy infinite bounty wishes to communicate to it, without hearing that word of life of which thy Apostle speaks. Then thou placest me in the way of thy love, reproachest me for my weaknesses, and conductest me to the holy practice of prayer. Never dost thou suggest to me extraordinary means of attaining to perfection; and I am not worthy of receiving those superior lights which thou hast so often communicated to thy Saints. But my faith is strengthened by the communion of thy adorable Body, and I am filled with astonishment to find that there are men upon the earth who doubt the reality of thy presence in this Sacrament. O divine bounty! O charity without limit! thus dost thou renew all my interior. But why are those moments so brief—why do

I so soon relapse into my indifference? It is, undoubtedly, because I have not a fixed resolution, because I do not possess that '*perfect spirit*,'\* strong and vigorous, which thy Prophet asked of thee—above all, my God, it is because I so soon forget the manner in which I should listen to thee.

This applies to prayer as well as to Communion. I ought to hear thee, O Lord, in silence, with humility, and a firm resolution to accomplish thy will. Silence of the soul—grand secret of the spiritual life! I have read in the histories of thy Saints that they retired into deserts, and selected the still time of night for their communications with thee. I have heard a St. Ephrem cry out, '*O solitude, ladder of prayer, peace of spirits, haven of the soul, unfailing remedy against the passions*;' &c. The world has not known, neither did it deserve to know, what passed in the communings of these great souls with thee,

\* Ps. l. 14.

their only good, their consolation, their joy, and their hope ; but I always understand by these examples, that thou art not perfectly heard but in the desert, that is, in an estrangement from society and from commerce with the world. The holy Founders of Religious Orders, dwelt in forests and sequestered valleys, where they assembled their disciples whose sole occupation was, to meditate on the things of eternity. The world has peopled these deserts, because the reputation for sanctity which those solitaries enjoyed, was spread beyond the bounds of their retreat ; and the world, by that dissipation which is natural to it, has destroyed silence, injured contemplation, and inspired curiosity and vanity. Those *angels* of the earth have become *men* by degrees, and even frequently angels of darkness. We must either destroy that edifice which was raised by the Spirit of God, or we must renew those ancient institutions by the recall of silence and solitude. Never, O my God,

wilt thou dwell in the confusion of Babylon!—never wilt thou speak to my heart, ‘*if I do not keep,*’ according to the expression of St. John Climacus, ‘*the eye of my soul without distraction, and the feelings of my body without motion.*’

I ought likewise, O my God, to hear thee with humility. Vain science is the creature of pride, and pride is the source of illusions and obstinacy in our own opinions. We may perceive this in the history of the false mystics. They were a set of men who were full of themselves, wedded to their senses, and who wished to compel, if I may say so, heaven itself to follow the wanderings of their imagination. Thou dost not, O Lord, hear those proud souls, those spirits who lose themselves in the maze of their own conceits. It is thy desire to be sought after in simplicity of heart, and thou never makest full, abundant or extraordinary communications, except to those who walk in those paths that have been already trodden by the saints.

Neither dost thou approve of long ratiocinations, or tedious discourses at prayer. We are at thy feet, like mendicants, who wait for the moment of liberality and mercy. It is the poor, “says Jesus Christ by the mouth of the Prophet, who shall eat and be satisfied.”\* Let us above all things bring this sentiment of humility to thy holy table—for there thou displayest for us all the treasures of thy magnificence. But let us add to it our good will, that is, a full and entire resolution to obey thee. It is in this we are most generally deficient. We pray like Augustine before his conversion, and we create delays as he did. We feel the great interest which urges us to live but in God and for God, but we say without ceasing, ‘*To-morrow, O Lord, to-morrow!*’† Ignorant beings! Do we not know that to-morrow will be insensible to the reproaches of to-day, that the same will happen every succeeding day, and that we will thus delay, until no

\* Ps. xxi. 27.

† Confessions viii. 12.

more time shall be allowed us, wherein to embrace the side of true wisdom. Ah, my God! I clearly understand—those delays serve no other purpose than to destroy our years one after another, and to make us forfeit for the pleasure of a moment, the precious pearl of a blissful eternity. Impart to my soul, I beseech thee, that strength of counsel and resolution, which will instantly break all my chains, which seizes on the present moment as the only one I can call my own, under the direction of thy grace, to turn me entirely to thee. Imprint upon me, O Divine light of spirits, this truth, which though most simple, strikes me at every instant—it is, that properly speaking, there is no *to-morrow* in this mortal life, because I cannot be assured of my existence to the close of the present day. Alas! every line which the Great star that enlightens us, traces on our globe, resembles that deadly writing which terrified the king of Assyria,\* al-

\* Daniel v. 5, 6.



though his senses were confused by intemperance. 'O man,' says this hour to us that vanishes before our eyes, 'thy decree is passed, thou hast come to thy last moment, all the splendor that surrounds thee is hastening to be obscured with me in eternity.' Lord, I do not require a Prophet to expound this oracle to me; but I cannot arise from the lethargy that has oppressed me for so many years, without the powerful voice of thy grace. I am resolved to listen to thee; and what dost thou say to me! The holy King, whose text is my guide in this exercise, is about to inform me.

### THIRD REFLECTION.

IF I LISTEN TO GOD, HE WILL SPEAK TO ME  
OF PEACE.

I AM in search of peace—that good so desirable, that blessing which *surpasses all understanding* according to the expression

of the Apostle.\* The world can give but a false peace ; hence my Lord Jesus, thou didst say to thy Apostles, that thou didst not bestow them peace in the same manner as the world.† The lovers of the world seem to be in peace ; they enjoy the gifts of fortune, health, riches, and the applause of the public ; they vary their amusements to gratify their inclinations. Yet this, O Lord, is only a supposition that I make, and I know how often the occurrences of life contradict those flattering pictures that are painted by the imagination without regard to truth. But no matter what those advantages are in which the fortunate of this world glory, let us ask them, if their heart be at peace, if they desire nothing more than they possess, if they do not fear revolutions that may destroy their fortune, or the intrigues of those who envy their false bliss, or the inconstancy of their friends, or the caprice of their patrons, or old age which will load

\* Philipp. iv. 7.

† John xiv. 27.

them with infirmities, or death which will force them to quit the world they adore? What reply would they make, O Lord, or rather what sighs would not issue from their troubled, agitated, and wounded hearts? Solomon was the most fortunate of men, and he cried out, in the bitterness of his heart, that all was vanity and nothing but vanity.\* This sentiment, O Lord, thou renewest and strengthenest in the soul of him who listens to thee, and thou dost add to it the gifts of thy peace, of that interior calmness which excludes fears and inquietudes, and raises an impregnable rampart against all adversities. This man may be, like Job, deprived of his goods, his family, his health. He may find himself exposed to the reproaches of the wicked, to the violence of persecutors, to the railleries of worldlings: but in thy presence, O my God, he will repeat that beautiful canticle of the Prophet: *'The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom*

\* Eccles. i. 2.

*shall I fear? The Lord is the protector of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?'*\* I here observe three things—*God who enlightens, God who protects, God who saves.* O light! O protection! O salvation! mayest thou diffuse peace, joy, and contentment on a soul which has quitted the world, which has chosen the Lord as its only portion, which listens in prayer to this divine Master, which brings with it every where the recollection of his holy presence!

Yes, it says, in continuing to adopt the sentiments of the Prophet: *When armies shall encamp against me, I will not be in trouble; when a cruel war shall be waged against me, it is in this very war I will place my hope.*† How sublime and magnificent are these expressions! The kings of the earth repose no confidence in their enemies, but rely entirely on their own troops. The good man, on the contrary, although alone, and isolated on the earth, places his hope in the multitude of

\* Ps. xxvi. 1.

† Id. 3.

his assailants, because he knows that the Lord will combat for him.

*I have only one thing to ask of thee, O my God! it is, to dwell in thy house all the days of eternity, which is, properly speaking, my life; it is to taste of thy delights in the eternal temple where thou dwellest.\** Ah, my God, notwithstanding the sweetness which I taste here below, as long as I entertain myself with thee, and listen to thee, *I desire, like thy Apostle,† the dissolution of this mortal body. I sigh after the moment when I shall be with my Saviour.* O eternal temple of my God! “*O mansion full of light and beauty,*” cried out Augustine,‡ “I love thy splendors, I love the palace where my Saviour reigns, where *his* glory shineth, who built thee, and who possesses thee. O heavenly dwelling, I sigh after thee all the days of my exile. I beg of him who made thee, that he may possess thee in me, for he has created me as well as thee.”

\* Ps. xxvi. 4.      † Philipp. i. 23.

‡ Confessions, xii. 15.

But in awaiting the moment of my deliverance, *I will go, O Lord, into the material temples, that are consecrated to thee on earth; I will sacrifice there a victim of praise, I will there celebrate thy glories.\** This is in reality, the consolation of thy friends, O my God; still bound to earth by the decess of thy providence, they visit thee in the temples erected to thy honor; they partake of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ; they approach the holy table; unite their voices with those of the ministers who are appointed to sing thy praises: they are never tired in repeating to thee with the holy King. Ah! great God, *my heart has said to thee with the greatest sincerity, that I seek after thee as the only good of my life, that I desire to see thy face,†* to enjoy thy presence, to drink at the source of thy love.

*All my parents have abandoned me, but the Lord has taken me under his protection.‡* The lot of all men is to lose gradually

\* Ps. xvi. 6.

† Id. 8.

‡ Id. 10.

those from whom they derive existence ; sometimes passions and diversity of characters break those links which nature had formed ; sometimes the different accidents of life place invincible obstacles to the most necessary and intimate friendships ; in fine, there is no intimacy that can resist the stroke of death ; it is the tomb that destroys all the friendships of the world, and breaks asunder the ties of the oldest and most delightful acquaintance. The Prophet was subject, like other men, to this law that is passed against all the human race : but he found in thee, O Lord, the most refreshing asylum : thou didst take him up like a deserted infant ; thou didst display in his behalf a tenderness far superior to that of the most generous father, or the most attentive mother. I recognise in thee the same favorable sentiments in my regard. I am upon the earth, without parents, without friends, without possessions, but thou holdest the place of all, and with

what sentiments of gratitude should I not repeat to thee without ceasing, the prayer of Jesus Christ: *O my Father who art in heaven!*

Full of confidence in thy infinite bounty, *I believe that one day I shall possess thy good things in the land of the living.\** No, my God, I have not language sufficient to express all the lights, affections, desires and resolutions with which this admirable verse inspires me. Yes, *I believe* with a most firm faith, that with the assistance of thy grace, *I shall behold thy own good things*, that is, thy immortal essence, thy divine attributes; this prospect inundates me with a torrent of delights, and I am also fully and perfectly aware that this place is by excellence *the abode of the living*, because it is the kingdom of *Him who is essentially*, because it is the kingdom of God who possesses, who bestows, and preserves that *life* of which he is the primitive and eternal source.

\* Ps. xxvi. 13.



O my God, can I henceforth disobey the lessons of thy Prophet. *Wait for the Lord*, he tells me, *take courage ; let thy heart be strengthened ; endure yet for a time the absence of the Lord.\** Yes, I will await in peace, the moment of thy visit: I will acquire new strength in prayer: I will preserve my heart from pusillanimity and dismay; I will content myself by knowing that thy absence will be of no long duration; and whilst waiting for my eternal lot, I will bless thee all the moments of my life.

## SECOND MEDITATION.

GOD THE CREATOR; I HIS CREATURE.

“Thy hands have made me, and formed me.” Psalm cxviii. 73.

I EXIST, and I enjoy the faculty of thinking; I cannot doubt of those two points, for I feel the demonstration of their truth.

\* Ps. xxvi. 14.

I have not always existed ; I have not always enjoyed the faculty of thinking. The very era of this existence, and this faculty, is quite recent in me. Many ages have passed away before I existed, or could think. Who has given me this existence and this thought ? Undoubtedly not myself, for it is absurd to suppose that he who at one time neither existed nor thought, could give himself, both life and thought. Neither do I derive these advantages from those whom I term the authors of my existence. They could be no more than the occasion of my life, and consequently of my thought. Did they understand the harmony of my body, and the nature of my soul ? Could they form in my body that admirable arrangement on which all its functions depend ? Could they adorn my soul with those different faculties which I perceive it enjoys ? Ignorant of all these things, they themselves derived their existence and thought from a power totally different from

what they were wont to revere as their source ; and the same may be said of every preceding generation until we ascend to the first man. All parents may declare what the mother of the Maccabees said to her children, ‘I have not given you the spirit of life. I have neither formed nor arranged the limbs which compose your body.’\*

This power, then, which has bestowed upon us both life and thought, can be none other than God ; and even this creation of myself, abstracting from the grand production of this world out of nothing, with all its inhabitants and its beauty, is sufficient to inspire me with a profound veneration for the wisdom, the power, the fertility, of this supreme Artificer. I then open the Holy Scriptures, and I there find that in reality he produced all those things with a celerity and freedom of action that could belong to none but an Infinite Power. I read there that the body of the first

\* 2 Macc. vii. 22.

man was formed from the earth in an instant, and there was wanted nothing but a *breath*, that is, an act of the divine will, to unite to this body a spiritual and immortal soul. I am convinced, then, O my God, both by reason and revelation, that thou art my Creator, and that I am the work of thy hands.

But why hast thou created me? It could be for nothing save thy glory and my own happiness—two truths which I ought to consider attentively in the secrecy of my soul.

## FIRST REFLECTION.

### GOD HAS CREATED ME FOR HIS GLORY.

THE wise man declares that *God has made all things for himself*,\* that is for his glory; but his glory consists in the knowledge which he has of himself, and the love which he entertains for himself.

\* Prov. xvi. 4.

Hence I perceive that if he has created reasonable and intelligent beings, he ought to impose upon them the obligation of knowing and loving him. Unless he acted thus, his creatures would not render him that glory of which they are capable, and his act would not be in the order of that knowledge and love which he has of himself, and for himself—it would be an action without a motive, and consequently one unworthy of God. Behold then, O Lord, the intention that influenced thee, if I may say so, when thou didst fill this world with creatures made to thy own image and likeness. If thou hadst created none but beings without sense or reflection, thou wouldst have been neither known nor loved; thy divine attributes would not have been revealed; thy power, thy wisdom, thy goodness, thy justice, would have been all concealed in thyself, without any exterior manifestation, because no creature could discern, esteem, or admire those wonderful perfections.

But thou didst create man with faculties superior to matter, and it is from man thou expectest here below that knowledge and love in which consists the glory that is due to thy sacred name—an imperfect glory, it is true, because we see as yet only through a veil, and *as it were in an enigma*, according to the expression of thy Apostle.\* But this is all which we have to offer, and all that thou dost require. Happy if we fulfil this essential duty, if we endeavour with all our might to know thee, and to love thee!

What have I to say, O Lord? I am filled with the greatest astonishment and the most humbling confusion. Though these principles are so clear, and these lights so brilliant, the history of the world informs me that for a long series of ages, the human race neither knew nor loved thee. Almost immediately after the creation, the family of the first man being separated and dispersed, ignorance blinded

\* 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

the spirits, and corruption infected the hearts of men—a small number of adorers was scarcely left thee, O Lord, in the succession of the Patriarchs. Thy justice was armed against a perverse world; thou didst destroy it by water; Thou didst restore it through a faithful man, and in a very short space the same ignorance and corruption overspread the face of the world. To these were added the worship of demons, those rebellious spirits against whom thy thunders had been hurled. It transformed into deities the works of thy hands—the sun, the planets, the earth, animals, reptiles, even herbs. It adored even the very passions and crimes, which, not created by thee, are merely the abuse of thy gifts. Some pretending sages raised themselves above the prejudices of the vulgar. They felt that man was degraded in offering homage to objects, which far from being able to improve, tended only to corrupt him. But what substitutes did they find for the idols of the gentiles?

Their own conceits, their systems, their doubts, their disputes, their pride. They were frequently on the brink of destroying all religion, because in those which they found established they saw nothing to satisfy them. During all this time, O Lord, thou wert known only in a corner of the earth. Even the people of thy choice allowed itself to be seduced one hundred times, by the example of its neighbors. They were frequently idolators, they remembered not the wonders thou hadst wrought for them, and it was necessary to chastise them with all the scourges of thy justice, to make them attentive to the instructions of their legislator and of thy prophets.

O my God, what an afflicting spectacle is presented to my view by these great truths! They tell me that sin has wrought strange revolutions in the heart of man—that we stood in extreme need of being repaired by Jesus Christ thy only Son,—that he alone could dispel the darkness of



our spirit, and heal the wounds of our soul—that his atonements, his examples, his doctrine, have replaced us in the path of our first origin, in this order of dependence which we owe to thee, in this holy alliance which man, the work of thy hands, has contracted with thee, in these entertainments of knowledge and of love which unite us to thee, in this wisdom of thought and action which all philosophy could not bestow, and which, without thee, we could neither obtain nor preserve.

And yet, O Lord, what benefit have I derived from the lessons of so great a Master? Can I say, like Augustine,\* that after having known and loved thee too late, after having searched for thee in created objects whilst thou wert within myself, that I have begun at length to approach thee, and to find that peace which the knowledge of thy holy name, and the love of thy divine attributes invariably bestow? Alas! I avow it with remorse

\* Confess. x. 27.

and confusion—I have been ignorant until now of my religion. I misunderstood the rights with which thy creation of me has invested thee. I have not at all reflected on the duty that was imposed upon me, of glorifying thee as long as I am upon the earth. Produce, then, in me, O Lord, what thou didst in Augustine. Call me, and cause me to hear thee. Strike me with thy light, and dissipate my darkness. Diffuse around me the odor of thy sacred name, and make me run after its delicious perfumes. Give me a taste of the knowledge of thyself, as thou art, and may I thirst without ceasing after thy love ! Touch me with thy powerful hand, and may I be inflamed with the desire of reposing in thee !

## SECOND REFLECTION.

GOD HAS CREATED ME TO MAKE ME HAPPY.

God has not created man to render him

miserable. It is sin that has introduced all the evils that are found in the world. Before sin, man was destined for a twofold bliss—the one temporal, which was to continue during this life, and which comprised an exemption from ignorance, from the rebellion of the passions, from pain and from death—the other eternal, which was to consist, after this life, in the clear and immediate vision of God. The principle of this twofold bliss, was sanctifying grace, the divine adoption in which the first man had been created. The first of the human race became a sinner, and forfeited for himself and his posterity all title to those blessings. Jesus Christ has redeemed, at the price of his blood, this unfortunate race. He has recovered for them the inestimable benefit of adoption; they are again called to enjoy God in a happy eternity. But it is necessary that those children of a rebellious parent should be still tried on the earth by adversity. For them everything has changed its ap-

pearance. They are born with a soul enveloped in darkness, with a will inclined to evil, with a body subject to weakness, to sickness, to death ; with a necessity of extracting, from an ungrateful soil, their daily subsistence. It is true, they still bear the image of their Creator, but it is changed and disfigured—and hence, their concern should be to approach this Divine resemblance by the assistance of their Redeemer's grace.

Here, my God, I reflect on the promise which Jesus Christ has made me, of admitting me into thy kingdom, if I be a faithful servant. Such is the nature of the immediate and essential goodness for which thou hast created me. But, O infinite mercy, I likewise acknowledge that notwithstanding the shame and misfortune of my origin, thou still affordest me an opportunity of enjoying only one sort of real and affecting bliss on this earth, which has been visited by thy curse ; it is that which thou makest me feel by the light of thy

holy grace, and it is on that I meditate, before I enter into the possession of the bliss which thou hast prepared for me in the life to come.

All my religion is based on this solid ground—that the principle of thought within me is immortal, that is, that my soul, this *breath* of the life with which my Creator has inspired me, shall exist even when death will have destroyed the harmony of my corporeal faculties. Independently of revelation, which assures me of this great truth, I hear within me a most powerful, vigorous, and continual cry after immortality. Nothing satisfies me here below—neither the possession of riches, nor the enchantment of pleasures, nor the splendor of dignities, nor the brilliant prospect of the world, nor the charms of society, nor the flattering noise of reputation, nor the eager desire which even all mankind might have of cultivating my friendship, exalting my merits, or increasing my praises. Even should I be able

to procure all these advantages, (a supposition which I know to be impossible), there would always remain in my soul an immense void, a violent desire of possessing and soaring without delay to more elevated objects. And from whence, O Lord, does this insatiable thirst arise? Is it not an evident proof of the goodness thou hast prepared for me? Yes, I am created for blessings infinitely superior to those which the earth affords; my soul is of a different nature from all that strikes my senses; it is limited in its knowledge, but not in its desires. It does not behold thee, O supreme beauty! except at a distance and through a veil, but it perfectly understands that thou alone canst satisfy it; it does not measure the extent of thy infinite perfections, but all its faculties declare to it that nothing save this infinity can allay its inquietude.

Profound reflection! and one which discloses to me a hundred truths, each of which is inestimable. A truth, that in

thee, O my God, is the source of goodness, because thou art the pure and essential good. A truth! that the soul of man is formed to thy image and likeness, because thou hast rendered it capable of beholding and possessing thee. A truth! that man is on this earth the masterpiece of thy power and thy goodness, because he contains within him the germ of immortal life. A truth! that every man ought to be to me an object of veneration, because the character of a blissful immortality is imprinted on his soul. A truth! that the death of the just is infinitely precious, because it puts them in possession of an unfading crown. A truth! that the just in heaven are inundated with a torrent of delights, because they share in that goodness in which thou dost take complacence. A truth! that the devil is *the first of murderers*,\* as Jesus Christ himself has expressed it, because by introducing sin, he destroyed the prin-

\* John viii. 44.

principle of eternal life. A truth, that in renouncing grace, I become my own mortal enemy, because I thereby renounce the right I possessed of reigning in heaven with Jesus Christ. O Lord, how the very idea of this life, this kingdom, this peace, this unchangeable goodness, raises my spirit and affects my heart! It is true, that the eye 'has not seen, nor the ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man to conceive, what things thou hast prepared for those who love thee.' But, without penetrating this mystery of glory, my faith teaches me that thou dost reveal thyself to the just, such as thou art; that they see thee face to face, and not at a distance; that in thy holy sanctuary there is 'neither weeping, nor mourning, nor pain, nor death;'<sup>\*</sup> that everything is changed and renewed, and entirely opposed to all the miseries of this life. The immensity and restlessness of my desires, convince me that thou alone canst fully sa-

\* 1 Cor. ii. 9.



tisfy my soul, and this is sufficient to break the yoke that has hitherto bent me to the earth. Oh! when I contrast this vale of tears, this theatre of blood, with the holy city that is destined for me by thy love, I cry out with thy sacred Prophet, 'My soul has exulted with joy since it has been announced to me that I shall enter into the house of the Lord.\* O holy Jerusalem! although still at a distance from thee, I dwell in spirit within thy eternal enclosure. I consider thee as an immense edifice, built throughout the entire extent of ages, to assemble together, one day, all the saints. Yes, all the tribes of the chosen people will be admitted into thee, that they may confess the glory of the Lord. In thee will be thrones to judge the nations under the authority of the Messiah, the true Son of God, and the true Son of David. Oh! that I am delayed from the possession of this peace, from the enjoyment of this bliss that is

\* Psalm cxxi.

prepared for those who sigh after nothing but this sacred abode! In the meantime I will speak to my brethren in Jesus Christ of the abundance and the glory that are promised them. I will converse with them on no subject save the house of the Lord, and the road that will conduct us thither.

But is it therefore true, my God, that besides the bliss which awaits me in my heavenly country, I may also flatter myself with being happy in this mortal life? If I direct my attention to the different conditions of mankind, I can discern no traces of what might be termed bliss. I find it neither in the possession of riches, nor in the splendor of dignities, nor in the enjoyment of pleasures, nor in the grandeur of exploits, nor in the success of enterprises, nor in the commerce of society, nor in the praise of sciences, nor even in the theory or practice of human wisdom. I do not perceive in those who enjoy these advantages any perfect contentment.

They always bewail their condition : they desire something which they have not, or some other advantage in place of that which they possess. On the other hand, I consider all the evils which overspread the face of the earth—poverty with all its humiliations, sickness with all its pains, wars with all their cruelty, the inclemency of the air with all its calamities, discord with all its furies, all the malice of fraud, all the foulness of calumny, all the atrocity of outrage, all the excess of libertinism, all the hard-heartedness of avarice, all the baneful effects of hatred and vengeance, all the blasphemy of impiety. Is not this as if all hell were let loose to render man unhappy ?

Ah ! Lord, this is a mystery whose meaning can be explained, and whose truth can be justified by thy holy gospel alone. This earthly abode is an habitation of trouble, of bitterness, and of grief to those who do not comprehend the doctrine of Jesus Christ nor make it the rule

of their conduct. Let them reach the highest degree of glory, and exist in the very bosom of pleasures, and still they will be unhappy; because the goods of this life are incapable of satisfying their possessor. Those, on the contrary, who have received the Word of Life that is written in thy Testament, walk in the road of bliss. Even if delivered up to all temporal misfortunes, they enjoy tranquillity of spirit and peace of heart—delicious fruits, which are planted and cultivated by the Holy Ghost in Christian souls. Can I doubt of the happiness of the Apostles, *when they went out full of joy from the Council of the Pharisees, where they had been loaded with opprobrium for the name of Jesus Christ?*\* Can I doubt of the happiness of St. Paul, when he cried out *in the midst of tribulations, that his soul was swimming in joy?*† Can I doubt of the happiness of the illustrious Martyr Ignatius, when he desired to be

\* Acts v. 41.

† 2 Cor. vii. 4.

torn in pieces by the lions? Can I doubt of the happiness of the Apostle of the Indies, Francis Xavier, when he said in his greatest labors and trials, *Still more, O Lord, still more?* Can I doubt the happiness of St. Theresa, when she asked of God *either to suffer or to die?* Can I doubt the happiness of all the holy confessors of the faith in their chains, and at the stake,—of the holy Anchorets in their deserts,—of the holy Virgins in their cloisters,—of the holy Penitents in their sackcloth and ashes?

Lord, on comparing the annals of the Church with those of the world, I find that none were happy but those who were under the sweet and amiable yoke of the Gospel. They alone enjoyed, even in the world, that peace which thou didst bring to earth. They lived and died without any other desire save that of praising, blessing, and imitating thee. They received the unction of the Cross, and under the shade of this sacred wood they found

that repose which all the favor of the world could not procure.

O Cross! source of bliss, and unfailing remedy against all the evils of life, I cast myself into thy arms to live and die there with Jesus Christ, who is *our wisdom, our justice, our sanctification, our redemption,\* our consolation,† our peace.‡*

### THIRD MEDITATION.

GOD IMMORTAL—I, SUBJECT TO DEATH.

“They shall perish, but thou, O Lord, remainest, and thy years shall not fail.”—Ps. ci. 27, 28.

THE Scripture furnishes us with two texts, by one of which we are informed that God *is He who is*; § and by the other, that *man is dust, and must return to dust.* || The first declares the necessary existence of God, together with his immortality and

\* 1 Cor. i. 30. † Philipp. ii. 1. ‡ Ephes. ii. 14.

§ Exod. iii. 14.

|| Gen. iii. 19.

immutability. The second reminds us that man is subject to death, and destined to return to the clay from which he sprung. These two oracles represent to us the Infinite and the finite—infinity, which is God, the finite, which is man; two extremes which we must always remember in the science of religion, and the exercises of a spiritual life. The infinity of God transcends my understanding, and the finite nature of man humbles my self-love. On the one side, an essential existence, an unspeakable duration, an eternity of glory; on the other, inevitable death, corruption, dissolution, the night and silence of the tomb. If I consider only the existence of God, I forget myself; and if I think only of the mortality with which I am clothed, I fall into despondence. By the joint consideration of those two truths I am instructed and consoled. I perceive what thou art, O my God, and I feel what I ought to be in thy presence. I am subject to death, but I thereby render homage

to thy immortality. For behold what I observe in death—its necessity, its uncertainty, its effects; its *necessity*, no man is exempt from this law—its *uncertainty*, no man knows at what time or in what manner he shall die—its *effects*, death breaks all the chains which bind us to what we love. These three things are a homage, or rather a threefold homage which we render, O Lord, to the immortality of thy nature; three reflections with which thy divine light has inspired me, and which ought to engage my attention in thy sacred presence.

### FIRST REFLECTION.

NECESSITY OF DEATH—FIRST HOMAGE WHICH  
I RENDER TO THE IMMORTALITY OF GOD.

It is appointed for all men to die once. No person ever doubted this truth, which is as ancient as the human race, and as strongly confirmed by fact as the princi-



ples of geometry are by evidence. The first step we make in the world, is a step towards the tomb. Each point of the course that we run brings us nearer to its termination; and with what celerity do we not arrive at this goal that is set up, in spite of us, by the decrees of Providence! The history of peoples and empires is but a history of death. All generations perish one after the other. Children tread on the ashes of their parents, and those children will be replaced by their heirs, who will leave in turn the same possessions to their successors. The earth which we inhabit is in some measure a desert, if compared to the region of the dead, to that multitude of tombs which have received for upwards of six thousand years the remains of the human race. Abraham was desired to *number, if he could, the stars of heaven,*\* in order to comprehend that his posterity would be innumerable. O man, may I say after this example, add to the

\* Genesis xv. 5.

stars of heaven the sands of the sea-shore, the grains of dust which are scattered by an impetuous wind, the atoms of air which fly around thee, and consider their immense number as nothing in comparison with the victims which are every day immolated by death, and which will be immolated to the end of ages—victims heaped together at the feet of Him, who alone, in his duration, comprises the past, the present, and the future ?

Behold, O Lord, the great sacrifice which is offered to thee by the children of men. Howsoever great or powerful they may be, they all come in succession to receive the stroke of death on the altar that is consecrated to thy eternal existence. I await this stroke like all those who have preceded me ; and I submit to a law which claims my respect, because it is intended to honor thy holy name, and to prove that sublime title of *Living God*, which I find in almost every page of thy holy Scriptures. *I live*, thou sayest, by

the mouth of Moses and thy prophets, *and the world shall be filled with my glory* ;\* *I live for ever, and it is I who give both life and death* ;† *I live, and I will display my vengeance against the wicked* ;‡ *I live, and I wish not the death of the sinner, but rather that he be converted.*§

O august name, which distinguishes thee, O Lord, from everything that is not God! The saints in heaven bend in adoration before him *who liveth and reigneth.*|| The Angel who is about to strike a guilty world, swears *by the living God,*¶ that the time of wrath is come. Peter received a pre-eminence above the other Apostles, because he confessed that Jesus Christ was the *Son of the living God.*\*\* Paul tells us, that we are all called to the service of *the true and living God* ;†† that all our hope is in *the living God, &c.* ;‡‡ and

\* Numb. xiv. 21.      † Deut. xxii. 39, 40.

‡ Ezech. v. 11.      § Id. xxiii. 11.

|| Apocal. iv. 9, 10.    ¶ Ibid x. 6.

\*\* Matt. xvi. 16.      †† 1 Thess. 1. 9.

‡‡ 1 Tim. iv. 10.

thy Church, thy holy Spouse, O my God, repeats without ceasing that thou art the Immortal God of Ages, *the living God*—she offers her sacrifice to thee as to *the true and living God*—she concludes all her prayers through *God who liveth and reigneth for ever and ever*, and in recommending to thee the soul of the dying Christian, she says that this creature was not formed by strange gods, but *by thee, who alone art the true and living God*.

Ah ! great God, how I am affected by thy life, this only and essential life which is in thee, as in its source ! I desire to repeat constantly with the Patriarchs and Prophets, *The Lord liveth, and I am in his presence*.\* Entirely mortal as I am, I desire to be occupied by thy life, or rather, it is because I am mortal, I wish to think of thy life during the days of my pilgrimage. Yes, death shall no more appear frightful to me ; it shall even seem amiable, for in rendering homage to thy life, it

\* 4 Kings, v. 16.

will cause me to acknowledge that thou alone possessest life ! O eternal and substantial life ! I ought to die, I wish to die, and I pray thee that I may die in the act of adoring and blessing thee, and saying to thee, as holy Job did, *I know that my Lord, who is at the same time my Redeemer, liveth.\** May I be able, at this last moment, to embrace on the Cross him who has said of himself, *I am the life!†*

## SECOND REFLECTION.

UNCERTAINTY OF DEATH—SECOND HOMAGE WHICH I RENDER TO THE IMMORTALITY OF GOD.

IF we could suppose that God were not immortal, his power over the life of men would be only commensurate with his duration ; and as this duration would be finite, we might imagine a time when men would become the arbiters of their own

\* Job xix. 25.

† John xvi.

destiny, with power to abridge or prolong their life, according to their own will. Chimerical supposition! and one which I adopt here, in order to convince me well, that those decrees which determine the measure of my days are enclosed in the eternity, the supreme and absolute immortality of God—decrees which are identified with the knowledge of God, and which all the understanding of man cannot penetrate—decrees which therefore leave us uncertain of the moment and circumstances of our death—but by a remote consequence, decrees that are the principle of the homage that we render to God, in being subject to a total ignorance concerning the day and the hour which are to close our mortal career. From thence, O Lord, I conclude that we are always and entirely under the power of thy eternity; that all the projects which we choose to form, are subordinate to thy supreme will, which counts all our moments, and does not reveal us their

number; that we ought to silence our desire of knowing the end and term of our course; that, in fine, we should be always in the condition of a sacrifice and a victim, awaiting the stroke that is to immolate us, without power to prevent or delay it.

But, O Lord, how many other truths appear to my soul whilst it meditates on this essential attribute of thine—life and immortality! Here is condemned the imposture of divination, which dares to usurp the right of knowing and predicting those things which cannot and ought not to be known except by thee. Here is also reproved, as an abominable crime, that outrage by which wicked men sometimes deprive themselves of life—as if that life were not a deposit confided to them by thee, and for which they will have to render thee a strict account. Here, likewise, is verified the wisdom of thy Gospel, which cautions us to be *watching* over ourselves, *for we know not the*

*day nor the hour\** of our entrance into a future life. Here, in fine, is confirmed that oracle of Jesus Christ, which commands us to be always *ready, because we know not the hour when the Son of man will come.*†

Ah! Lord, behold a truth which fills me with astonishment at thy adorable eternity, and with confusion for the disorders of my life. Being eternal, thou hadst in thyself neither time nor succession; and thou hast created time for me, in order that by spending it profitably, I might come to contemplate thee for eternity. Thou possessest always and at all times thy entire being, with its infinite and unspeakable attributes; in thee there has been no past, nor will there be a future. Thou *art*, O my God, and all thy eternal counsels are ever present to thy intelligence. But, by a sublime knowledge, of which I can form but an imperfect notion, thou dost penetrate the nature of time—

\* Matt. xxv. 13.

† Matt. xxiv. 44.



thou dost distinguish successive duration, the order of my thoughts, the course of my days, and months, and years—thou permittest me this manner of existence, with an obligation of contributing to thy glory all its details and all its varieties; and thou warnest me to be on my guard, because thou mightest summon me before thee at any of these moments. And yet what is the consequence, O my God! This time, which is so valuable, and so convincing a proof of thy liberality, I squander away; I bestow it on trifles, on frivolous amusements. I can be even so blind as to find it troublesome and insupportable, and to invent a thousand perverse and ridiculous modes of relieving myself from it. I suffer this time to run to waste, this fertile field in which I could sow the good grain of the gospel; I throw away for the vilest price, this precious pearl, which all the treasures of kings could not purchase. O Lord, I know not whether the present hour may be the last of my

life ; and yet I abuse this hour, I abandon it to thy enemies, I surrender it to the world, to the devil, to sin, to my passions. What shall I then do henceforth, and with what dost thou inspire me, O infinite mercy ? For I feel in thy holy presence that it is necessary to repair my lost years, and to regulate a prodigality which insults thy bounty, and removes me from the ways of salvation. Ah ! I begin by entertaining the most profound respect for thy sacred and unchangeable eternity ; next, I accept time from thee as an inestimable present ; I consecrate to thee all its divisions ; I offer myself in sacrifice to be immolated by thee at any of these moments, according to the decrees of thy infinite wisdom ; I render thee the homage of all the years of my life. They already belong to thee, because thou art eternal, and because I hold them from thee ; but I also desire they should belong to thee by the choice of my will. Accept this holocaust, O sovereign Master of all time !

I carry my years as Isaac bore the wood of his sacrifice ; the fire and the sword are in thy hands. Strike, O Lord, when the moment determined by thy Providence shall arrive ; but before the blow be stricken, light up this sacred fire in my heart, and let this fire consume all the inutilities of my life, all the unfruitful plants which my passions have produced—all the fruits of death that have sprung from sin—so that at the hour of my death I may be a holy and reasonable host, and agreeable in thy eyes, worthy to live with thee and thy elect, in a happy eternity.

### THIRD REFLECTION.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF DEATH—THIRD HOMAGE  
WHICH I RENDER TO THE IMMORTALITY OF  
GOD.

THE consequences of death are, privation of all exterior goods, dissolution of the body, extinction of all moral being: employ-

ments, affinities, friendships, consideration in the world, power, credit, &c. Death annihilates all this train of man, if I may so call it. Riches and possessions descend to his heirs; his body becomes the prey of the tomb—his glory disappears. When David wished to describe the state of humiliation, abandonment and forgetfulness to which his persecutors had reduced him, he said he was become like one dead,\* because we know not a more complete destruction than that which death every day exhibits to our view. Here, O Lord, is the grand homage which man renders to thy immortality. Thou art always in possession of thy being, thy riches, and thy glory—and man loses at his death his existence, his treasures and his renown. Thou reignest in heaven; thy throne is ever environed by legions of angels, who bless, without ceasing, thy holy name—and the most powerful monarch of the earth, after having disturbed

\* 1 Mac. 3—8, 9.

the repose of mankind, is confined to the solitude of the tomb, and is frequently subject to the raillery and reproach of posterity. *Alexander*, says the Book of Maccabees, *forced the earth to keep silence before him : he died, and his servants divided the empire after him.\** Oh ! if this conqueror had known the hand that conducted him to the extremities of the world, which supported him in his battles, which rendered him master of so many nations, he would have performed a sublime and heroic action, by acknowledging at his death, that there is one alone who is great, one alone who is powerful, one alone who is wise, because there is only one Immortal Being ! But, madman as he was, he wished to usurp the rights of the Divinity ; and by this frenzy of ambition he proved that he was the most despicable of all men, because he renounced the lights of reason.

I place myself, O Lord, in thought, at

\* Job xvii. 14.

the last moment of my life. I have neither possessions, nor talents, nor existence in the world, to sacrifice to thee, and the remains of my body are doomed to be mingled with the ashes of the vilest of mortals. But I desire to offer thee a heart detached from everything, a spirit occupied with thy unrivalled and immortal greatness. I will say, like Job,\* *to rottenness and worms, that they are my inheritance*, but that thou, O my God! that *thou alone possessest power, glory, and wisdom*,† because thou alone possessest life. I will say, like David, that I am going *to pass away like a shadow, to wither like the grass of the fields, to vanish like smoke*,‡ but that thou, O Lord, *art always the same, and that thy years shall not fail*.§ I will say with the Apostle, that *the moment of the last sacrifice has come*;|| but that my hope is in thee, O immortal King, *to whom alone belong honor and glory for ever and ever*.¶

\* Job xvii. 14. † Eccl. xv. 19. ‡ Ps. ci. 4-12.

§ Ibid. 28. || 2 Tim. iv. 6. ¶ 1 Tim. i. 17.

I derive then, O my God! great consolation from the subject of this exercise—*God immortal, I, subject to death.* I experience the sweetness of thinking that thou alone art life, and that I render to thee the homage of the few days thou hast bestowed me upon earth. This moment of existence, is not, properly speaking, a life : *it is*, says St. James the Apostle,\* *a vapor which exhales* ; it is, says holy Job,† *a breath of wind* ; *it is a light mist*, says the wise man,‡ *it is a web hardly begun*, says the holy king Ezechias, in Isaias;§ *it is an image, it is even nothing*,|| says the Royal Prophet. Can I be so insane as to attach myself to such perishable things? Ah! I will rather say with the same Psalmist, *My soul sighs after the strong and the living God : when shall I approach him, when shall I see his face? Ah! why should I be sad, or resign myself to grief? The Lord is my salvation,*

\* James iv. 15.

† Job vii. 7.

‡ Wisdom ii. 5.

§ Isaiah xxxviii. 12.

|| Ps. xxxviii. 6, 7.

*he is the God of my life. I will go in to his admirable sanctuary : I will offer him a sacrifice of praise \* with the saints, who are satiated without end in the bosom of his adorable eternity.*

#### FOURTH MEDITATION.

GOD EVERYWHERE PRESENT ; I, ALWAYS BEFORE HIS EYES.

“ Whither shall I go from thy spirit ? or whither shall I flee from thy face ? ” Ps. cxxxviii. 7.

THE infinity of God is the foundation of his power, his action, and his knowledge. God can do all things, God does all things, God knows all things, because he is infinite. But if God can do all things, doth all and knoweth all, he operates in all places ; and as his operation is not distinct from his essence, it follows that if he operates in all places, he is also everywhere present. In this operation and this presence consists

\* Ps. 3—5, 6.



his immensity ; an attribute which we cannot represent to ourselves as an extension or corporal diffusion. God is a pure spirit ; he is everywhere present, he is immense, as a pure spirit. We ourselves, who have spirits so limited, can reach by thought, objects that are separated from us by distance of place ; we can make them present to our understanding. But we do not physically operate upon them ; we are not present in the places where they exist, we remain inclosed within the limits of our own existence. There is nothing less analogous to the immensity of God, than the narrow sphere by which we are confined. It is as if finity were compared to infinity.

It was necessary, O Lord, that I should be well assured of thy holy presence, in order to this form idea—very imperfect, it is true, but one proportioned to my feeble lights, and sufficient to inspire me with suitable respect for thy supreme, infinite, and immense Majesty. All the disorder of my life has arisen from the unfrequent

and imperfect consideration of this great truth—that thou canst do all things, that thou dost all things, that thou knowest all, that thou dost operate and exist in all places, and that I am always in thy presence. I desire, this day, under the direction of thy grace, to be confirmed in the holy exercise of thy continual and actual presence. I consider there are two things infinitely necessary for me, death, and life ; interior death, interior life ; both composing the essence of a true Christian, and both inseparably united in the exercise of thy holy presence. For thou givest me to understand, O my God ! that without this exercise I cannot be interiorly dead—first reflection ; and also that without this same exercise, I can have no interior life—second reflection: *Lord, said the Prophet, thou knowest everything that is in me : thou dost penetrate the inmost recesses of my soul. Show me, therefore, the way that leads to life.\**

\* Ps. cxxxviii. 2, 3, 24.

## FIRST REFLECTION.

WITHOUT THE EXERCISE OF THE PRESENCE OF  
GOD, THERE IS NO INTERIOR DEATH IN ME.

THE state of a true Christian, is a state of death. *You are dead to sin*, said St. Paul to the Romans;\* *let not sin reign in your mortal body, by obeying its concupiscences*. The Apostle means the concupiscences of sin, which are, according to St. John, † *the concupiscence of the eyes*, or avarice;—*the concupiscence of the flesh*, or impurity;—*the pride of life*, or ambition. These are three sources of death which I ought to destroy by a true and precious death, which will render me conformable to Jesus Christ, who died for sin.

But how can I procure this interior death, without the exercise of the presence of God; I feel within me a cupidity which attaches me to the goods of earth. It is true,

\* Rom. vi. 11, 12.

† 1 John ii. 16.

my God, that this desire of possessing and accumulating without end or limit, is a proof of my immortality, the longing of a soul that is created to enjoy infinity. But this soul, blinded by passion, bestows on unworthy objects its love and esteem. And why does it thus degrade itself? Why does it wander from the path which thou hast marked out for it? It is, because it loses sight of thee, O source of all bliss! It is because it does not place itself nigh to thee, who alone canst fill and satisfy it. I am not perhaps plunged in the shameful and ridiculous excess of avarice; but am I exempt from uneasiness at the possibility of my being deprived of the little I possess? have I made in the sincerity of my heart, the sacrifice of what I cannot possess? Am I ready to surrender for the wants of my neighbour, what thy Providence has given me for the relief of my own? have I never formed projects of collecting round me a circle of conveniences, which are a portion of the existence, and, too often, of

the miseries of the wealthy in this world? Without saying, like the foolish man in the Gospel, *I will pull down my barns and will build greater, and into them I will gather all things that are grown to me, and my goods*, am I not scrupulously careful to provide everything that can contribute to my superfluous comfort? Ah! Lord, if a hermit in his cave were not attentive to thy presence, he would have within him all that fund of avarice condemned by the apostle. This cursed root cannot be destroyed but by the continual remembrance of thy Providence, which watches over all our wants,—of thy bounty which feeds the birds of heaven,—of thy wisdom, which has ordained that the necessaries of man should be extremely limited. Interior death does not consist in renouncing the goods of earth; it consists in the extinction of earthly desires. *You covet*, said the apostle St. James, *and you have not. . . . Adulterers, know you not, that the friendship of this world is the enemy of*

*God?\** As if he had said: That which makes you enemies of God, is your attachment to the world and its goods, even if those goods be imaginary and have no existence but in your desires. Oh, my God! may the consideration of thy presence be a powerful remedy against this evil, which is as ancient as the world. One hundred times has it disturbed the whole earth, overturned kingdoms, and deluged provinces with blood—because men, full of cupidity and avarice, forgot that they were always present before thy eyes—that thou didst condemn their unjust and barbarous enterprises—that they were disposing of thy goods without thy permission—that they were plundering their equals, their brethren, and thy children. The great usurpers, the celebrated conquerors of paganism, wished to be deified; after having trampled under foot all the laws of humanity, they insisted that altars should be raised to their honor,

\* James iv. 2, 4.

an evident proof that they had entirely lost sight of thee, the only Master of the world,—of thee, by whom kings reign, and on whom the lot of empires depends. I cannot call to mind without trembling the countless disorders which have been produced by this insatiable thirst of riches, but I cease to be astonished when I reflect how rare amongst men is the exercise of thy presence. *Thou didst look down from heaven on the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand or did seek God. And thou didst see that all men had gone aside from the way of life; and thus have they all committed iniquity, and devoured the substance of thy people.\** Thy Prophet renews at every instant the same reproaches. He invariably attributes frauds, rapines, usurpations, and invasions to the forgetfulness of thy holy presence. Ah, holy God! God, immense and present throughout all space! do not permit me, (in this narrow sphere to which I am con-

\* Ps. lii. 3, 4, 5.

fined, and in which I cannot sufficiently bless thy holy name,) to wander from the contemplation of this truth—that thou dost all in me, and that I hold everything I possess under thy amiable Providence, which is to me the tenderest of mothers. *I have forgotten thee*, as Jeremy reproached thy people, *for innumerable days* ;\* but I flee for refuge to thy bosom, and am resolved never to quit an asylum that is impervious to all my passions.

I have hitherto considered the ravages which are caused by concupiscence of earthly goods in a heart that is empty of God, and a spirit that is not occupied on God. There is a second enemy still more dangerous, because it has an intimate connection with our rebellious flesh. It is the inclination which hurries us into the pleasures of sense. Interior death is absolutely necessary against this persecuting enemy, who is no less obstinate than cunning. But this death will never

\* Jerem. ii. 32.



take place in us without the continual exercise of the presence of God. The chaste Joseph is solicited to crime by an impudent woman, and on so delicate an occasion, he arms himself with the presence of God. *How can I, says he, commit such an action, and sin before my God?\** Susanna falls into the hands of two infamous seducers, and she cries out, that *it is better for her to be exposed to their vengeance than to sin in the presence of the Lord.†* On the other hand, why did the sons of Heli profane their ministry by shameful debaucheries? It was, says the Scripture, *because they no longer thought of the Lord.‡* Why did Solomon surrender his heart to strange and idolatrous women? It was *because his spirit was turned away from the Lord God of Israel.§* Why did the two old men attempt the chastity of Susanna? *Because they no longer looked up towards heaven,||*

\* Gen. xxxix. 9.

† Dan. xiii. 23.

‡ 1 Kings 11, 12.

§ 3 Kings xi. 9.

|| Dan. xiii. 9.

that is, towards the presence of God. Why did Augustine, in his youth, abandon himself to those disorders which he acknowledges in his Book of Confessions? Because he was not interiorly occupied with the presence of God, *the only nourishment which could satiate his soul.*\* Ah! Lord, it was the consideration of thy holy presence which made chastity flourish in the deserts, which filled with virgins the sacred retreats of religion, which preserved apostolic men pure and untouched in the midst of the fires of Babylon. It was this wisdom which *crieth aloud in the public streets,*† which apprises us that *the Lord considereth all the ways of man, and that he is attentive to all his steps.*‡ *It is this,* says the Prophet, *that enlightens darkness, and disturbs those delights with which passion would flatter itself.*§ Yes, my God, in vain should I retire from the world, like the Hilarions and Pacomiuses, this body

\* Confess. iii. 1.

† Prov. i. 29.

‡ Ibid. v. 21.

§ Ps. cxxxviii. 11, 12.

of sin would follow me even to the desert, this guilty flesh would torment me even in sackcloth and ashes. Thy holy presence is the chief armor in which I should be clothed, if I wish to be chaste before thy eyes. *O chastity!* exclaimed St. Ephrem, *who art always united to the true good!*—that is, who art always ravished with the beauty of God, with this pure and unmixed beauty, with this beauty which we are created to love without bounds, and with an undivided heart! O chastity, whose charms induced Augustine to enter into the ways of justice! what strength dost thou not derive from the holy presence of God! The Book of his Confessions is but a history of the transports of this holy penitent towards the Lord, who was always present to his spirit, and always speaking to his heart. But, my God, since thou inspirest me, as thou didst Augustine, with the desire of being united to thee, in order to repress the impetuosity of this sinful flesh, permit me to ask thee,

with him, where I may be able to find thee and enjoy thy presence? *No space separates me from thee, and, nevertheless, I am at a distance from thee.\** Thou art near me; thou art in me; and yet I am dissipated by created objects. The false joys of the world struggle within me against the sweet and precious tears of penance. The criminal life of sin withholds me from that interior death which ought to be my only portion. Have pity on me, O Lord! I am sick, and thou art a physician; I am miserable, and thou art merciful. Above all, Divine Master, do not banish me from thy presence, do not suffer me to forget thee. As long as thy holy presence shall not be obscured in my spirit, I will preserve the inestimable treasure of chastity, which is so pleasing to thee.

But I have still to combat a third concupiscence, which is pride, the unhappy fruit of the revolt of the first man, a domestic poison which can infect even vir-

\* Confess. x. 26.

tues themselves. Paganism had some ideas of frugality, of contempt of riches, of continence, and even of chastity, but none of true humility. It was necessary that God should speak to men before they could learn this sublime doctrine, and that men should hold converse with God before they could experience it. There the presence of God speaks volumes to those souls that are not blinded by incurable passion. It is pride that produces vanity, ambition, unfeeling conduct to our neighbour, bitterness, slanders, calumnies, revenge, disdain, hypocrisies, heresies, schisms, and apostacy. Of this last crime the Holy Ghost says, that *the beginning of pride is to renounce God as the apostate does.*\* Now, O Lord, there is none of these monsters that is not opposed to the belief and the exercise of thy divine presence. The proud man not only forgets thy grandeur and thy majesty, but places himself in some measure, on thy throne. He says,

\* Eccl. x. 14

like the chief of the rebel angels: *I will ascend to the heavens, I will place my dwelling near the clouds, and I will be like the Most High.\** He says, like the impious men of whom David speaks, *We will magnify our tongue, our lips are our own; who is Lord over us?†* He says, like Nabuchodonosor, *I will be the only powerful, the only formidable personage on the earth.‡* He says, like the children of Edom, *Who shall bring me down to the ground?§* He believes, like Antiochus, that he is able to *exalt himself to the stars.||* Yes, O Lord, there is in the heart of the proud man a fund of all these unworthy and ridiculous pretensions. He forgets his baseness, his nothing—he wanders amidst his own conceits, and this happens because thy holy presence has vanished from his eyes; *as if,* says the royal Prophet, *he who formed the ear did not hear, or he who made the eye*

\* Isaias xiv. 13, 14.

† Psalm xi. 5.

‡ Judith ii. 3.

§ Abdrias 3.

|| 2 Macc. ix. 10.

*did not see, or he who judges the nations would not punish, or he who penetrates the thoughts of men would not condemn the vanity of the human heart. Ye fools !* continues the Psalmist, *be wise at last, and consider what is the knowledge of the God of Jacob.\** I have been ignorant, O Lord, of this super-eminent knowledge, and I avow it in the bitterness of my heart, when I remember my vanity, my presumption, my arrogance, my hauteur, my humour full of haughtiness and intolerance, the detestable fruits of the pride that has infected my whole life. Sometimes I openly rise up against my superiors, criticise their conduct, find fault with their undertakings, judge and despise their ways. Sometimes I have attempted to impose on my equals a yoke, the more intolerable, because I had no right to domineer over them. I have required attentions, regards, and assiduities from them. I have been incensed at their indifference,

\* Psalm xciii. 8, 9, 10, 11.

and still more at their opposition to my pretensions. Sometimes I have loaded my inferiors with the burthen of my pride. I have irritated them by my disdain, my raillery, my passion, my unjust and ridiculous commands. Sometimes I am occupied by phantoms of ambition; I fancy that all the roads to fortune lie open before me, and that I may hope for all those distinctions that are lavished by the world on favour and talent. Sometimes when disappointed in my expectations, I become sad and discouraged; pride makes me avoid the presence of men, wish for solitude, fall out with my friends, and give up the most becoming and necessary conversations. Almost every day have my discourses been filled with the recital of my affairs, my employments, my undertakings, my success. I have related nothing that interested others, and I believed that they should feel no interest for anything but what concerned me. And how often have I mingled with my good works and



exercises of piety, sinister intentions, vain motives, and hypocritical views ! O Lord, I can say with thy Prophet, that *all these evils have befallen me, because I have turned away from thy presence,\** because I have been placed out of thee, and out of myself: out of thee, in not considering that to thee alone belongs glory—out of myself, in not beholding the absurdity and folly of my conduct. I have wandered in darkness, although invested with thy light. I had before my eyes the history of thy saints,—of Enoch, of Noe, of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob, of Samuel, who all *walked in thy presence ;†* of the holy Job, who said, that *the Lord considered all his ways, and numbered his footsteps :‡* of the royal Prophet, who always had thy divine Majesty *present to his thoughts :§* of Tobias, who in a land of strangers and idolaters, *remembered every day in the bottom of his heart the Lord his God :||* of

\* Dan. ix. 13. † Gen. v. 22 : vi. 9 : xlviii. 15.

‡ Job xxxi. 4. § Psalm xv. 8. || Job i. 13.

Mary, thy holy mother, who recounted to the glory of *thy holy name, the wonderful things which had been wrought in her* :\* of Paul, thy great apostle, *who no longer regarded himself as living himself, but as one living in thee, by thee, and through thee.* † These great souls were models of humility, because they were always in thy holy presence. They were occupied in reflecting on their own nothingness, for they beheld in themselves nothing but thy greatness.

O holy presence of God! principle of sacred humility, I deliver myself entirely to thee ; possess all my spirit and all my heart, in order that the Lord my God may be everything in me, and I, nothing in my own estimation.

\* Luke i. 49.

† Galatians ii. 20.

## SECOND REFLECTION.

WITHOUT THE EXERCISE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD, THERE IS NO INTERIOR LIFE IN ME.

THE apostle did not think it sufficient to tell the new faithful that they were *dead to sin*, he added that *life was in them*; a *life hidden with Jesus Christ, in God*,\*—a life during which they expected the enduring life of glory. This life hidden in God, with Jesus Christ, cannot exist without the exercise of the presence of God; for it ought to be a life of recollection, a life of prayer, a life of love—three kinds of life which evidently suppose that he who enjoys them, attentively considers the presence of God in his interior.

Recollection is a thing quite familiar to all those who apply to business or to learning. No interesting discussion, no plan of study can be conducted without attention of spirit. The senses are hushed

\* Coloss. iii. 3.

to silence, all the energies of the soul are summoned, if I may say so, to concentrate upon the proposed object. The more important and difficult this object is, the greater the anxiety to remove from all dissipation and external tumult. Do we imagine that the affair of salvation can be conducted without the same dispositions, without the same preparations for entering into ourselves? But when we enter into our own hearts, what do we find in our interior? Thee, O my God, thee, present to our soul. This is the focus in which are centered the regards of our spirit, and the affections of our will. Thou dwellest in us to be *our strength, our bulwark, our shield, our asylum*.\* I place all these titles together, because thy prophet has frequently expressed them all, in affording us through his psalms an example of recollection. He was so careful to remove everything that could withdraw him from thy holy presence, that he was

\* Psalms passim.

wont to entertain himself with thee during the darkness of the night. *I remembered thy holy name*, said he, *during the night : I arose at night to sing thy praises.\**

O night ! how well dost thou represent to me the state of a soul that is recollected in the presence of God ! The shades which thou spreadest over the earth, are an image of that mysterious veil which this soul draws between itself and everything that is not its God ! The stillness into which thou hushes all nature, announces the tranquillity enjoyed by this soul that is attentive to the sight of its God ! The sleep to which thou invitest animals and men, represents to me this soul which watches no longer but for its God ! The interruption which thou seemest to cause to the motions of all beings, places before me that state of indifference in which this soul lives in regard to every affair that has no relation to its God ! O Life of recollection, so well known to the

\* Psalms passim.

saints, and of which I have hitherto had so little idea, because I knew not how to enter into the presence of God, because I have considered this exercise to belong only to hermits and solitaries! At the same time, O Lord, there is a circumstance that fills me with admiration at the wisdom of thy ways, and with confusion for my own blindness. When St. Paul presented himself in the Areopagus, before the Athenians, who were so notorious for their levity, curiosity, and idolatry; before those men, who, to all appearance, were so little competent to reflect on the doctrine of salvation; the Apostle began his discourse by speaking of thy immensity, of thy presence in all created beings, of the recollection that is necessary in order to find thee, and to hear thee. *Athenians*, said he, *I announce to you a God whom you know not. He produced all mankind, from one man, to dwell upon the whole face of the earth, determining appointed times and the limits of their habitation, that*

*they should seek God, if haply they could feel after him or find him, although he is not far from every one of us, for in him we live, and we move, and have our being.\**

Sublime doctrine ! and a doctrine which contains all the perfection that is proposed to those who are called to the most interior life. The shortness of life—the uncertainty of the time of death—recollection in order to seek and hear God—the intimate presence of this sovereign Being in every one of us—our dependence on him for life, motion, and existence. The Apostle adds in the sequel of his discourse, the obligation to do penance—the future judgment to which the whole world must submit—the gift of faith offered to all by Jesus Christ ; in fine, the resurrection of the dead, of which that of Jesus Christ is the model ; but we may observe that the Apostle commenced with the presence of God, and the necessity of entering into

\* Acts xvii. 19.

ourselves in order to acknowledge that presence.

How I am confounded, O Lord, by this discourse, when I compare it with my aversion to meditation—when I contrast it with my levity and dissipation—when I reflect on this presence of thy adorable Being within me, and on my inattention to thee, O supreme God, in whom I have life, and motion, and existence! I have hitherto been as inconsiderate and frivolous as the Athenians. I have, like them, sought after the novelties of the world. I have been occupied like them, with public applause. I have frequently disputed, like them, on philosophical questions, and almost never have I beheld thee within me, although thou didst everything in me, and I was nearer to thee than to myself. Ah! great Apostle, I have deserved all the reproaches which thou madest this idolatrous people; but I do not wish, like the greater part of those fickle men, to despise thy doctrine, or to defer leaving thee to



another time. I desire, like the small number of those who adhered to thee on that occasion, to be from henceforth recollected, that I may be occupied with the presence of the God of majesty, to which hitherto I have not attended.

Recollection is the first step to be made in a spiritual life ; but without prayer, it will be no more than a mere homage rendered to the presence of God, it will by no means produce in the faithful man, that holy union which ought to exist between him and his Creator. Prayer is the link of this union, and the soul its substance ; for it consists of an elevation of the spirit and an affection of the heart. God is the end of those two operations ; and as his bounty is infinite, so he turns to the soul that seeks him—he enlightens it, he instructs it, he animates it, he hears its prayers. But, O Lord ! if he who prays, be not filled with thy holy presence, if he be not anxious to contemplate thee, and to hear thee, whilst thou actest and speak-

est within him, how canst thou be pleased with his prayer? Alas! in our conversations with the great ones of the world, how attentive are we to study their inclinations, to receive their answers, and to lose nothing of their favours or promises—and in our conversation with thee, O my God, what languor, what indifference, what distractions! Every moment we are out of thy presence, we wander in a maze of trifles, and frequently through the labyrinth of our vices and our passions. It would seem as if prayer were a time destined to concert measures for the regulation of all our affairs—a time for reflecting how we ought to treat our neighbours, our friends, and our enemies. We act in some manner like those profane wretches whom Jesus Christ scourged out of the temple—we transform the holy place of prayer into *a house of traffic*.\* But whence arises this vice, so deplorable and yet so common amongst Christians?

\* John ii. 16.

In the first place, we never, through the course of our lives, establish within us the habit of attention to the presence of God. We are always out of him, and we do not wish him to approach us, or be intimate with us, except during the brief space of our prayers—a chimerical pretence, and one entirely opposed to the views of his providence. *Prepare thy soul before prayer, says the Holy Ghost, and be not like one that tempts God* ;\* that is, remove all strange objects from thy interior, give the Lord free access to thy spirit and thy heart. He desires to be *adored in spirit and in truth* ;† he wishes that we should *pray in the Holy Spirit*.‡ To confuse the praises of the Lord, with the interests of his enemy the world, is to pray in the synagogue of Satan.

In the next place, we have not had a sufficiently lively faith in the presence of God. We make prayer an exercise of habit ; it enters into the order of our ac-

\* Eccl. xviii. 23. † John iv. 23. ‡ Jude 20.

tions as an indifferent practice. We bring to it few supernatural views, little desire to profit, few objects of reformation in our conduct. If we were properly convinced that prayer is an audience to which God admits us, that we are in his presence only to thank him for his benefits, to obtain the pardon of our sins, to solicit new graces, to heal the wounds of our soul, to learn how to combat our passions, what efforts would we not make to pray with modesty, with fervor, with even those *groanings*\* that accompanied the prayers of the Royal Prophet ?

In the third place, we know not how to profit by the presence of God. The Lord is even more present to speak to us, than to hear us. He knows our wants much better than we do ourselves ; he knows how to enlighten our spirit and to touch our heart ; he wishes to intimate his will to us, and it is our duty to lend an ear and be attentive. When we have exposed to

\* Psalm vi. 7 : xxx. 11 : xxxvii. 9, &c.

him our wants, represented our miseries, and poured forth our sighs, let us listen to his voice, which is as sweet as it is powerful. We then need not fear that the thoughts which will enter into our minds shall not tend to the perfection of our soul and the regulation of our morals. We shall then find ourselves determined to practise charity, humility, meekness, and patience towards our neighbour. We shall then experience more light in our spirit, more strength in our will, more estrangement from the world, more hatred of ourselves. Lord! I owe it to thy grace to acknowledge that thou frequently speakest to me in prayer, and in the holy communion. It would be impossible for me to doubt thy word, and I fear thou wilt call me to a terrible account for the manner in which I have abused those divine instructions.

In the fourth place, we retire from prayer without a determination of keeping ourselves in the presence of God. We

do not say, like the spouse in the Canticles—*I have found the beloved of my soul, and I will not let him go.*\* When prayer is over, we become dissipated as if we had not been conversing with God; prayer is but a sort of truce which we make with the world. We re-enter this tumultuous whirlpool where the presence of God can no more subsist, than his spirit could dwell with the first inhabitants of the world, because they were *delivered up to the flesh.*† Ah! Lord, my God, how necessary is the exercise of thy holy presence for me if I wish to become a man of prayer! I recite vocal prayers, and they are the canticles of thy servant David; the exercise of thy holy presence is recommended in almost every verse, and yet I pay thee this tribute of praises without piety, without attention, without motive, frequently without even conceiving what my tongue repeats; and this without doubt is an inexplicable fault, because it would not be at

\* Cant. iii. 4.

† Gen. vi. 3.

all difficult to understand and appreciate the different sentiments of thy Prophet. I have not given up the custom of mental prayer, which is, properly speaking, the moment of thy holy presence. I cannot even say that it appeared tiresome or painful; but I must have abused this precious gift, since after so many years of prayer, I am still as culpable, as filled with self-love, as full of myself, as if I had never entered this way of perfection. Prayer is the bulwark of chastity, the mistress of truth, the protectress of humility, the bridle of intemperance, the school of meekness, the mother of simplicity, the remedy of passion, the invincible armour against all vices. What use have I made of this inestimable treasure? I have squandered it, O Lord, and I know the reason;—because I have neglected the supernatural exercise of thy holy presence. Thou inspirest me at length, to enter upon this way, *to remember thee continually, and to bless thee* at all times, in all truth, and with my whole

heart\*—this is the testament which the holy man Tobias, left to his children. He never lost sight of thy holy presence, and he considered that he could not leave a more precious inheritance to his posterity.

The life of a Christian is a life of love, and it is here we behold the triumph of this holy exercise of the presence of God. Recollection and prayer smooth the way of love; but the exercise of the presence of God introduces us to this way, enlightens us in this way, supports us in this way, conducts the soul to the end of this way; without it we cannot arrive at the life of love. When God exhorted his people to love him with a sincere, faithful, and constant love, he told them *to walk in his presence*;† and when he declared to Moses that this people would one day violate this essential law of love, he said that this revolt would take place, because those people would turn away from his divine presence. All the reproaches made by the

\* Job xiv. 11.

† Deut. xxx. 16, 17.



prophets to Israel, invariably turn on this forgetfulness of the presence of the Lord. The law of love is the same in Christianity. Whosoever is faithful to the presence of God, arrives at the love of God; and he who abandons this holy presence, will also violate this great precept of love, towards both God and his neighbour. He transgresses against it by avarice, by impurity, by pride; he violates it at all periods, under every circumstance, and in all the occurrences of life. He at length begins to violate it with scandal, with impudence, without measure, and what is the height of blindness, he stifles the remorse of conscience, and is thereby reduced to the state of a hardened sinner. On the other hand, O Lord, what does not the recollection of thy holy presence produce in a soul that loves thee! What a life is this life of love—of love which is absorbed as it were in thy holy presence! Ah! would that I could explain how this divine light of thy presence reveals all the sense and all the

meaning of this grand precept of love ; how it makes us understand what it is *to love with all our heart, with all our strength, with all our mind ;\** how it persuades us *that charity is the only end of the law ;†* how it suggests from above, means by which we may *love our neighbour as ourselves ;‡* how it recalls to our mind all those characteristics of charity that are prescribed by the apostle in so excellent a manner ;§ how it repeats without ceasing that *God is love, and that he who abideth in love abideth in God, and God in him ;||* how it fills us with terror when it causes us to remember that *he who does not love the Lord Jesus Christ is accursed ;¶* how it encourages us to say with the Apostle, *who shall separate us from the love of Jesus Christ ?\*\** how it bestows upon us the understanding of this great truth, that *charity is poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit that is*

\* Matt. xxii. 37. † 1 Tim. i. 5. ‡ Matt. xx. 39.

§ 1 Cor. xiii. 4-8. || John iv. 16. ¶ 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

\*\* Rom. viii. 35.

*given to us ;\** how it informs us what it is to be *rooted and founded in charity* ; how it makes us *comprehend the breadth and length, and height and depth of the love of Jesus Christ for us, and the super-eminent knowledge of this holy love ;†* how it consoles us in assuring us that *charity covereth a multitude of sins.‡*

But what would not this light be, O my God, if I could penetrate the mysterious manner in which thy sacred presence is unveiled to the faithful soul that approaches thee in communion ! Ah, this is the moment of light and of love. It is here one learns to die to himself, in order to live but for thee. Here self-love is attacked in its inmost recesses—the new man is substituted for the man of sin, the earth is forsaken in order to turn the attention to heaven. Jesus Christ being present, speaks to the heart, and causes it to hear the doctrine of life—a doctrine superior to all that

\* Rom. v. 5.

† Ephes. iii. 17, 18.

‡ 1 Peter iv. 8.

the study of the most profound mysteries could disclose. I am silent, O Lord, on these divine communications—I am unworthy to speak of them, and far more unworthy to receive them. I am a sinner, and it is my duty with the assistance of thy grace, to recall myself to life by the holy exercise of thy presence. Grant that I may walk henceforth, before thee, and I will say like thy Prophet, *that thou hast made known to me the way of life, and that thy presence has filled me with joy.\**

## FIFTH MEDITATION.

GOD, A MASTER AND LEGISLATOR ; I, HIS SERVANT AND SUBJECT TO HIS LAWS.

“ Lord, I am thy servant, and the son of thy handmaid.”—Ps. cxv. 16.

I HAVE acknowledged that God is my Creator, that he is supremely powerful,

\* Psalm xv. 11.

supremely wise, supremely good; that he has created me for his glory and to render me happy; that I cannot be happy without obeying him, and that it is this obedience that distinguishes the wise and good man, from the man of folly and the sinner. But obedience supposes laws, and I must be aware that the Creator has made a code of laws for me and for all men: natural laws, as ancient as the world, as extensive as the reasonable beings that people the earth, as well known as the first principles of speculative sciences,—natural laws, which enable me to distinguish good from evil, justice from injustice,—which are the foundation of good faith in commerce, of order and peace in kingdoms, of sweetness and harmony in societies,—natural laws which Jesus Christ has renewed, perfected, and consecrated by his doctrine and examples, and to which he has attached promises much more ample and more clear than had been made before him. The Gospel

of Jesus Christ is henceforth the rule of all men, and mine in particular.

I ought here to consider the characters of this holy law; it seems to me they are contained, or at least, announced in the 18th Psalm, although it was composed many ages before the coming of Jesus Christ. Its author was a prophet; and St. Paul, who knew so well the harmonies between the Old and New Testaments, has quoted this canticle when he wished to prove the extent to which the preaching of the Apostle had reached.

O my Lord! I admire in this Psalm the qualities of thy holy law, and I make it the subject of this meditation. Thou art my master and legislator: I will not be thy faithful servant until I perfectly understand what thy law is in itself, and the relation it bears to me. Ah my God! it is written that *the man is happy whose will is fixed in thy law, who meditates upon it day and night.\** Enlighten my understanding

\* Psalm i. 2.

that I may know this holy law. In flame my heart with the love of this holy law. I come to acknowledge that I have been nearly at all times a rebel to this holy law ; my spirit is seized with confusion, but *it is good for me* (as thy Prophet teaches me) *that I am humbled in order that I may learn the extent and the beauty of this holy law.\**

### FIRST REFLECTION.

THE LAW OF GOD IS SPOTLESS, IT CONVERTS  
SOULS.†

IN the history of nations I behold many laws, but none without a defect ; some were too severe, and others too indulgent ; sometimes they authorized injustice, and sometimes profligacy. If they preserved order amongst citizens, they suffered domestic dissensions to pass without a remedy ; when they appeared favorable to religion, they degenerated into super-

\* Psalm cxviii. 71. † Ibid. xviii. 8.

stitious or ridiculous practices ; political reasons often prevailed in them, over the rights of humanity. They could render people laborious, courageous, enterprising, and victorious, but could never make them virtuous ; whilst they cherished vices, they repressed some passions ; against timid minds they had some force, but very little control over the ambitious great. It belonged to the Lord alone to establish laws *without spot* and without reproach. Oh, what would not be the regulation of the world and the condition of men upon earth, if the Gospel law were faithfully observed ! What peace amongst families, what union amongst citizens, what integrity in commerce, what subordination in the different classes of which society is composed, what kindness to the poor, what anxiety to prevent each other by good offices, what respect for religion, what modesty, what temperance, what disinterestedness ! But, O Lord, I should not engage myself here



with a plan of perfection which would constitute the happiness of the whole human race. There is no question but of myself, in this retreat, to which thy Providence has conducted me. If I make thy holy Gospel my only rule, what shall I become in thy sight and before men? This Gospel is pure, and *without spot*; it even *converts souls* according to the expression of thy Prophet. It is pure and *without spot*, because it discloses all truth and all perfection. *It converts*, because it gives that grace which Jesus Christ came to pour upon the earth: it is pure and *spotless*, because it has formed all those saints who glorified thee on earth, and who now chaunt thy praises in heaven: *it converts*, because it reforms the interior after the great model, which is Jesus Christ. Ah, Lord! this holy law is *pure and spotless*, and I am the centre of all passions, of all impurities, of all malice, of all vanities, of all chimerical or unjust pretensions, of all revolts against thee, of all scandals, &c.

This holy *law converts*, and yet, for so many years that I have known it, that I have professed to reverence and practise it, it has changed neither my spirit nor my heart. What, O Lord! this law has converted the world, it has resisted the fury of tyrants, it has triumphed over idolatrous princes, it has borne thy cross to the extremities of the earth; and shall it have no effect upon me? With the sign of salvation imprinted on my forehead, shall I be as pagan in heart as the nations who have not known thee, or who have persecuted thee? Thy Prophet says, that *a young man corrects his way in keeping thy holy law* ;\* age, experience, proximity to death, everything, O Lord, speaks to me in favor of thy holy law; shall I be as foolish as those old men of whom the wise man speaks,† and whom he says *thou holdest in detestation* ?

\* Ps. cxviii. 9.

† Eccl. xxv. 4.

## SECOND REFLECTION.

THE LAW OF THE LORD IS FAITHFUL, AND  
GIVES WISDOM TO SIMPLE MEN.\*

THE fidelity of a law consists in the certainty of the promises and threats that are annexed to it. Every perfect law ought to reward those who are obedient, and punish the rebellious and disobedient; and this forms what is called the *sanction* of a law. It generally happens that human laws are imperfect with regard to this *sanction*. They threaten much, but confer little reward: they are nearly always armed with terror, and rarely accompanied by kindness: they seem to suppose that man is sufficiently rewarded when he is not punished, or when he simply knows that he has done his duty. This imperfection in human laws, arises

\* Ps. xviii. 8.

in a great measure from the narrow limits to which the power of the legislators is confined; they can always punish those who violate the law, but however rich they may be, they can never be sufficiently wealthy to reward every act of fidelity to the law.

This is not the case with the divine laws. If the legislator be infinite in justice, he is equally so in liberality and bounty; if his punishments be severe, his rewards are conferred with a magnificence that is worthy of himself; he never even promulged his laws without beginning to recount his promises. When Moses proposed, in the name of God, the code of laws that were destined for the government of his chosen people, he dwelt at considerable length on the blessings annexed to the observance of those laws. When Jesus Christ spoke of fidelity to the commandments, he likewise recounted the bliss prepared for faithful souls.—*If you wish, said he, to enter into life, keep the com-*

*mandments* :\* and in the excellent discourse which he delivered on the mount, he commences in these consoling words : *Blessed are the poor. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are the merciful. Blessed are the clean of heart, &c.* † and to each of these blessings a promise is attached. Here we behold the characteristic feature of the divine laws. Infinite Being, alway can, and always wishes to reward the virtue of his servants, and this reward is ever rich, magnificent, and *superabundant*. ‡

Nevertheless, O Lord, I see thy holy laws dishonored in the world by men who enjoy all the advantages of fortune. I behold, on the contrary, those who observe thy precepts, not only without a recompense, but also exposed to the raillery of libertines and the persecution of the wicked. Where, then, is the sanction of thy holy law ? and to what a trial are not the just exposed, when, instead of that applause which virtue merits, they meet no-

\* Matt. xix. 17.

† 1 Id. v. 3.

‡ Id. v. 12.

thing but hatred and contempt? But, this objection, O my God, is refuted by thy prophet, when he tells me that *thy law gives understanding to simple men*. By this understanding they know that the state of oppression in which virtue is often found, is an evident proof of a future life: that the plan of thy holy religion is only sketched out in this world, and that it will be completed in that eternity where thy justice and fidelity will be fully manifested. This wisdom of which the Psalmist speaks, is, if I may use the expression, the key of thy entire gospel. I already know from reason, that an immortal soul cannot be satisfied with the goods of the world; that a God infinite in goodness and wisdom, could not confine the bliss of this soul to objects so unworthy of its notice and to a space of time so brief in duration. But the gospel entirely opens to my view the order of providence which thou hast established for the preservation, justification and glory of thy holy laws.

Yes, these laws will receive their accomplishment and their sanction at the last day, when thou shalt render to every one according to his works. Oh! what grandeur, what majesty and truth, in this legislation! How the plan on which it is formed, and which is no other than thy infinite wisdom, fills the souls of the just with consolation; how powerfully it supports them in their labors and their sufferings! Besides that interior joy which is produced in them by thy love, they can also confidently say with thy Prophet, *I have turned my heart to the observance of thy commandments, on account of the reward that is promised me.\**

\* Ps. cxviii. 112.

## THIRD REFLECTION.

THE LAW OF THE LORD IS RIGHT, AND IT FILLS  
HEARTS WITH JOY.\*

To say that the law of the Lord is not right, just, and free from reproach, would be to doubt of the righteousness, justice and sanctity of God himself. The law of God is stamped with the character of the attributes of God. But how can I understand the nature of this law, if I have no idea of justice and righteousness, that is, if my reason do not tell me to distinguish what is just from what is not? This reason which is capable of knowing the justice of the law, and of applying this knowledge to different moral actions, in order to judge whether they be conformable, or otherwise, to the law—this reason is, properly speaking, conscience. From the judgment which reason forms on this con-

\* Ps. xviii.



formity to the law, flow peace, and even interior joy to the soul. On the contrary, from the judgment reason forms on the opposition to the law, trouble, inquietude, and remorse, proceed—a state most opposed to spiritual joy, and the most capable of rendering a man miserable in this life.

I conceive then, in what sense the Prophet says that the law diffuses joy through the soul. It is, that when reason decides our actions to be conformable to the law, it produces in the soul a state of repose, content, and even delight, *which surpasses*, as the Apostle says, *all understanding*.\* Jesus Christ, praying for his disciples, says to his Father, *all these things I command them, that their joy may be complete*.† St. Paul declares that *he who acts according to what he approves*, that is, according to conscience, *is happy*.‡ When he exhorts the faithful to be occupied with nothing but *what is true, honest, just, holy, conformable to charity and virtue*, he pro-

\* Philip. iv. 7. † John xvii. 13. ‡ Rom. xiv. 22.

mises them *peace and joy*.\* This joy continues even in the midst of tribulations, as the same Apostle so frequently repeats; and behold the triumph of thy holy law, O my God. *It diffuses joy through faithful souls*, it diffuses the same even through penitent souls. *To my hearing*, says the Royal Prophet, *thou wilt afford joy and gladness, and the bones that are humbled shall rejoice*.† On the other hand, the wise man says, *wo to the impious, who abandon the law of the Most High, they shall live in malediction, and at death, a curse shall be still their portion*.‡ How can they enjoy peace, asks again the Royal Prophet, *the fear of the Lord is not before their eyes?*§ And why should not the just be *at peace?* *They love the law of the Lord*.||

O my God! I revere all the oracles of thy holy books which promise peace, consolation and joy to the faithful observers of thy law; which proclaim trouble, per-

\* Philipp. iv. 4, 7, 8. † Ps. l. 10. ‡ Eccl. xli. 11, 12.

§ Ps. xiii. 3. || Ps. cxviii. 165.

plexity, and even despair to the enemies of thy law. But the testimony of my own heart is sufficient to convince me of these truths. When has my soul been at peace, unless when I was faithful to thy law? When has my interior been disturbed with care and anxiety, so that I was almost insupportable to myself, unless when I wandered from the path of thy law? Madmen, that we are! says St. Augustine, we seek for pleasure, and we lay hold of a phantom, and this phantom cannot prevent us from being miserable. Why do we not adhere to thy holy law, which alone can procure us true pleasure, pure joy, and constant bliss, for *a happy life consists, O my God, in rejoicing with thee, through thee, and for thee!*\*

\* Confess. x. 22, 23.

## FOURTH REFLECTION.

THE LAW OF THE LORD IS LIGHTSOME, IT ENLIGHTENETH THE EYES OF THE SPIRIT.\*

THIS is one of the great characters of thy holy law, O my God! *It is bright* in itself, *and it sheds light on spirits*. Human laws are often obscure; they require to be interpreted, explained, and developed; and be they as clear as possible they do not act on our understanding. The letter which announces them is dead and powerless; our souls must be roused and exercised in order to comprehend it. But thou, O eternal light, *thou enlightenest every man that cometh into the world.*† Thou enlightenest them by thy divine word, by Jesus Christ, who is by excellence, *the light of the whole world.*‡ The law of this Man-God partakes of the qualities of its author. It strengthens the understanding of the

\* Psalm xviii. 9. † John i. 9. ‡ Ibid. viii. 12.

faithful man; it enlightens him not by making him penetrate the depth of mysteries—for this is the object of his faith and the principle of his merit;—but it convinces him of the truth of these mysteries, it develops their proofs, it renders him immovable in their belief. It does still more, in those points that regard morality. It unveils the entire; it shows him all the relation of this holy doctrine with the nature of man, and all the rules of conduct which he should draw from it for every circumstance of life. Oh how this thought elevates my spirit, and affects my heart. God is my legislator, and he chases away the darkness of my understanding, that I may be able to adhere inviolably to his law! He wishes that I should *walk in the light*,\* that I should be *a child of light*,† that I should *live by light*,‡ that I should be even *light itself*.§

Here I behold the superiority of my vo-

\* John xii. 35. † Ephes. v. 8. ‡ John i. 4.

§ Ephes. v. 8.

cation to that of the Israelites. They had a law it is true ; but this law did not enlighten them of itself—the glory with which it filled their soul was derived from a future Messiah. This law commanded charity, but did not bestow it. For this, it was necessary to wait for Jesus Christ, because it was by his merits it was to be obtained. This law, as far as the Jewish people were concerned, threatened death, and repressed crime by fear ; but as far as it related to all nations who were to enter the church of Jesus Christ, it promised life, and allured to fidelity by the sweet and powerful insinuations of love. The Prophet beheld all the relations of this law, and has celebrated them in that beautiful canticle, the 118th Psalm, which is, properly speaking, the ecstasy of a heart penetrated with the beauty of this law. This holy law communicates light and life—it points out the way—it consoles—it strengthens hope—it reveals truth—it is the joy of the heart—it inflames the will—

it removes inquietude—it arms us with power to speak before the great—it condemns those who wander from the path of duty—it shows itself as destined to exist throughout all ages!

What harmony between this admirable canticle and thy gospel, O my God! But what a contrast between those great attributes of the law, and the indifference with respect to it in which I have lived. Ah! may this law now begin to enlighten me! It communicates grace and love, for it is the law of grace and love. May I know it! May I practise it! May I die repeating: *Happy are they who have walked in the law of the Lord!*\*

\* Psalm cxviii. 1.

## FIFTH REFLECTION.

THE LAW OF THE LORD IS ACCOMPANIED WITH  
A HOLY FEAR, AND IT SUBSISTS FOR EVER  
AND EVER.\*

IN this verse the Prophet announces fear and not the law: but it is evident he means the fear commanded by the law—that he has in view even the fear commanded by the law of love, since he says this fear is altogether *holy*, and that it *subsists for eternity*; these expressions could be applied to none but a fear that is filial, and inseparable from love.

I therefore understand that the law must be kept in the same manner that the Apostle desires us to work out our salvation *in fear and trembling*.† But this fear should be worthy of a Christian; and behold the order which reigns in the economy of salvation. Fear without hope would

\* Psalm xviii. 10.

† Philipp. ii. 12.



make us slaves—hope without fear would make us presumptuous—but fear united to hope conducts us to charity, and charity perfects both fear and hope. The union of those three virtues, works the accomplishment of the law, and the law perfectly accomplished, obtains a crown of glory. We may perceive that this entire edifice is raised on faith, which is the foundation of all Christianity. I ought to examine myself on those great principles. Have I a true faith, a true fear of God, a true hope, a true charity, a true submission to the law? Alas! O Lord, *no one knoweth whether he is worthy of love or hatred.\** It is a secret hidden in thy eternal and infinite wisdom. But does my conscience tell me that I would be ready to sacrifice my life for my belief in those holy truths of religion? Does it tell me that I place all my hopes of salvation not in my own strength or exertions, but in thee! Does it tell me that my only fear is to lose thee,

\* Eccl. ix. 1.

and not to be deprived of goods, reputation and life? Does it tell me that I prefer thee to everything, and that I am ready to undertake, perform, and suffer all things for thy love? Does it tell me that I study, that I love, and embrace with affection, all thy holy law? It will not suffice to answer these questions in a speculative manner: no, it is in thy presence, and at thy feet, O my God, that I must reply to them. But with what confusion am I covered? I can say with much greater truth than thy Prophet: \* *My heart is broken within me: all my bones tremble. I am as it were out of my reason, at the sight of my interior, at the voice of my conscience, at the remembrance of what the Saints have said and done in order to observe thy holy law.*

\* Jerem. xxiii. 9.

## SIXTH REFLECTION.

THE LAW OF THE LORD IS TRUE, AND IT  
JUSTIFIES ITSELF.\*

I READ in the original text that *the law of the Lord is truth*, and that *it justifies itself all at once*; that is to say, that directly it is announced, it is found true, just, holy, and irreproachable. There is great meaning in these expressions. The law of the Lord is truth, because its author is truth itself, because its precepts are analogous to the truth of God, and to the real wants of man; because its maxims establish a true regulation of morals; because its promises are based on truth and finished in truth; because its rewards are the enjoyment of truth itself; because those who conform to it are men of truth in their words and their actions; because the knowledge of this law is superior to all the truths that can engage the mind of

\* Psalm xviii. 40.

man; because, no matter what revolutions happen in the world, this law still remains true; because this law is the principle of true content and true happiness in the soul. It is not necessary to enter into a demonstration of each of those points. If I run over the decalogue, I see that every article which it contains, excludes all kinds of doubt—and if I follow the gospel through its moral details, I cannot even in thought, dispute against this admirable legislation.

I flatter myself, O Lord, that I love truth. The very word truth, affects my soul and touches my heart. Why then am I such a rebel to the truth of thy holy law? I perceive the cause, or rather a multitude of causes, in my imagination, in the opinions I have adopted, in my self-love, in my passions, in my evil habits—behold the veils which I draw between me and the truth of thy holy law. There is not one of my words, of my acts, or of my affections, which thy gospel cannot direct,

and of which it ought not to be the guide. But *I* who raise this veil against thy law, am an impious master; I would wish to direct the helm, to govern alone, and even to have the audacity to accommodate thy gospel to the caprices, humors, and excesses of my self-love. It is *I* who commit this sacrilege, because my self-love is false, treacherous, deceptive, and because it seduces me with more address even than the serpent employed against Eve. How long shall I be the sport of this domestic enemy? I know it, I even despise and hate it in my cooler moments, but in the details of my conduct, I am not the less a slave of its tyranny.

Thy grace alone, O my God, can banish this illusion, strengthen me against seduction, and recall me to the truth of thy holy laws. O my Lord! *all thy ways are mercy and truth.*\* May thy mercy this day reveal to me thy truth, and may thy truth procure me admittance to thy mercy!

\* Psalm xxiv. 10.

## SEVENTH REFLECTION.

THE LAW OF THE LORD IS MORE DESIRABLE THAN GOLD, AND PRECIOUS STONES; IT IS SWEETER THAN HONEY AND THE HONEY-COMB.\*

THE Prophet here recounts those things that are most precious and sweet, in order to make us comprehend the value and sweetness of the law. He tells us that the law of the Lord is *more desirable than gold and precious stones*, that is, than all the goods which are most coveted by avarice, and he adds that this same law is *more sweet than the honey-comb*, that is, than all objects which flatter sensuality. It required a Prophet to give us this great lesson. The greater part of human laws is neither sweet *nor desirable*; they breathe severity, they curb liberty, they allot punishment for the rebellious. How often

\* Psalm xviii. 11.

have not those laws been resisted by people jealous of independence and resolved to shake off their yoke? Hence, it is a maxim in politics, that laws should not be multiplied if we wish to preserve peace amongst citizens. To the divine laws alone it belongs to gain hearts and to charm them by sweetness; they are a sweet yoke, a burthen which comforts, rather than oppresses, those who carry it. When St. Paul said *there was no law for the just man*,\* he did not mean that his justice entitled him to acknowledge no law, but merely, that the just man submits willingly to the law, and so willingly, that it would seem as far as he was concerned, there was no law at all. The proof of this is a matter of experience and feeling; of experience, if we examine the conduct of the just—of feeling, if one enters into himself who runs a career of justice. What then is observable in the entire life of one who is a true Christian

\* 1 Tim. i. 9.

and perfectly obedient to the gospel? A holy liberty which influences all his conduct—a freedom of action and conversation which charms all those who witness it—a fixed and generous determination to do good, and an insinuating talent for persuading others. What does one experience in himself when he walks in the path of the commandments? And why do I say *walks*? The Prophet says *I have run in the way of thy commandments when thou didst open my heart.\** O holy liberty of soul! who can understand or appreciate thee, unless he who is filled with love for the Lord and for his law? I do not wonder that the holy King extended to such a length, that celebrated canticle which is the eulogium of the law. This object was more dear to him than all the treasures of the earth, more agreeable than all the delights of the world. Lord I have already entertained myself in thy presence with this immortal monument that is raised to

\* Psalm cxviii.



the glory of thy law ; but I cannot conclude this exercise without observing that the Prophet there asks every moment to be *vivified* by thy law. Ah ! life is more desirable than gold and precious stones : life is sweeter than honey and the honeycomb, and it is in thy law the Prophet wishes to find life ! What an idea this gives me of thy law, O my God ! In thy law is life—out of thy law is death. The invincible desire which I have for life ought then to attach me to thy law. The continual opposition to death and to everything that causes death, which I feel ought also to prevent me from disobeying thy law. Yes, I wish to live by thy law ; I wish to preserve within me by the assistance of thy powerful grace *the law of the spirit* of life which will deliver me like the Apostle *from the law of sin and of death*.\*

\* Rom. viii. 2.

## SIXTH MEDITATION.

GOD HOLY ;—I A SINNER.

“Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for no man living will be justified in thy sight.”—Psalm cxlii. 2.

God has said in his divine Scriptures, *I am holy*, as well as he said, *I am who am*. Sanctity is not only an essential, but also a distinguishing attribute in him. He is called by excellence *the Holy*,\* and this name is never given to the heathen divinities, although in various parts of the holy books they are termed *gods*. Sanctity is as it were, the perfection of the perfections of God, in as much as he is holy in his justice, holy in his mercy, holy in his omnipotence, that is to say, infinitely perfect in all those attributes. Sanctity is the supreme and incomprehensible purity of God. I represent it to myself like that *sea* or that *river of crystal* which the Apostle

\* 4 Kings xix. 22. Ps. xv. 10. Isaiah x. 20.  
Daniel ix. 24. Luke i. 35, &c.

St. John saw flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb.\* This image fills me with affright, because I am a sinner, that is, one full of impurities. God is holy in his nature, in his decrees, in his works, in his word, in the worship which he requires. I am a sinner in all those points, wherein the sanctity of God shines forth. The Apostle saw in this sea and this river of crystal, an emblem of sanctity; and he could behold in me nothing but pits of the abyss whence issue vapors that are capable of obscuring the sun.† What a contrast, O Lord! and how I ought to be already humbled at what I am about to meditate upon in thy presence. Grant me light to know thy sanctity on one hand, and my own sins on the other, in order that I may be able to glorify thy sanctity, bewail my sins, and live like an inhabitant of the city of the saints.‡

\* Apoc. iv. 6.—xxii. 1. † Id. ix. 2. ‡ Ephes. ii. 19.

## FIRST REFLECTION.

GOD HOLY IN HIS NATURE, I A SINNER AT  
THE FIRST MOMENT OF MY EXISTENCE.

It is not sufficient for me to know that the sanctity of God is his infinite and incomprehensible purity. I consult his divine oracles, and I see there annexed to the word *sanctity* and *saint* a most profound meaning, and one at the same time well calculated to afford me some idea of the sanctity of God; hence I may conceive by opposition, a true notion of sin. A saint or holy person, in the language of sacred writers, is one who has no connexion with profane objects, one who is entirely separated from earthly, vile, impure, and corruptible things. Thus the *Holy of Holies* was the most secret part of the tabernacle and the most removed from the sight of men; the holy festivals were those on which there was a total

abstinence from servile works: the holy people were those whom God had entirely separated from the society of the gentiles; the holy vestments were those which were used only by the ministers of religion and in the duties of the sanctuary; the holy covenant was the law which distinguished the chosen people of the earth. The word *sanctity* invariably announces that which is separated from common objects, that which is of a superior order, that which contains an excellent and sublime destination.

God is holy in his nature, because he is alone in his order of infinite being; because in him there is no mixture of what is created and finite—because he is, not only exempt from all imperfection, but the source of all perfection. The gods of the Gentiles could not be holy. They were too numerous, and they partook of the weaknesses of humanity and even of the vices which disgrace it. The sanctity of God is a supreme attribute which admits

neither equality nor likeness, which excludes all relation with whatever is not God. Thus the holy books represent God to us as *dwelling in inaccessible light* ;\* *as reigning in the highest heavens, and seated on a throne which the clouds encompass* ;† *as surrounded by heavenly spirits who veil themselves with their wings in his presence.*‡ *Holy, holy, holy*, exclaim those blessed intelligences ; that is, O God, infinitely exalted above all things, infinitely separated from every order of created beings, infinitely happy in the possession of thy proper perfections, *thou alone deservest to be honored, glorified and blessed for ever and ever !*§

The greatest opposition to sanctity is sin, because sin is a state of mixture and confusion with earthly objects. Sanctity exalts us above those objects, separates us from them, and triumphs over them. Sin in some manner seizes the sinner

\* 1 Timothy vi. 16.

† Eccl. xxiv. 7.

‡ Isaias vi. 2, 3.

§ Apoc. iv. 8, 9.

and plunges him into filth, baseness and degradation, makes him lose that quality and excellence which consist in being what he ought to be, and maintaining himself in his order. Lord! I can feel those truths better than I can express them. Thou art holy by thy nature, by thy infinitely infinite essence; and I am a sinner in my origin, I am covered with sin at my birth, and consequently with disorder and degradation. Thou art holy in thy justice which has subjected all the posterity of Adam to this anathema. I do not conceive all the extent of this justice, but I perceive, if I may use the expression, that being infinitely holy, thou couldst withdraw thy spirit from all the children of the first man by reason of the sin of their parent; that thou couldst abandon them to concupiscence, to ignorance, and to the miseries of this life. If the head of this great family had been faithful, we would have been all born with those sublime gifts which thou didst heap upon him,

and this would have been a pure favour on thy part. Why have we been born without this grace? Why are we even at the first moments of our existence the objects of thy wrath, only because our head has been unfaithful? Thy justice is as infinite as thy bounty. I therefore O holy God, impose silence on the murmurings of my reason, which is too feeble to penetrate the mystery of mankind's reprobation. *I have been born in iniquity, and my mother has conceived me in sin.\** This is to me a most powerful motive to adore thy incomprehensible sanctity, to fear the rigour of thy judgments, and to have recourse to thy infinite mercy.

## SECOND REFLECTION.

GOD HOLY IN HIS DECREES: I, A SINNER IN MY THOUGHTS.

THE decrees of God are in the style of the divine Scriptures, *the thoughts of God.†*

\* Ps. l. 7.

† Ps. xxxix. 6.



These thoughts are holy like God himself \* They are from himself alone, and to himself alone ; they bear no resemblance to ours. We behold some traces of those thoughts in the construction and preservation of this world. We remark yet more in the revealed Scriptures. But *who*, says the Apostle, *can comprehend the thoughts of the Lord, or who hath been his counsellor?* † He had thoughts of providence for man, before his sin ; he had them for the human race repaired by Jesus Christ ; he has them for each of us as long as we remain on the earth ; he has them for our future state in eternity. All those thoughts of God are infinitely holy and worthy of his wisdom. That which I know, strengthens my faith, in that of which I am ignorant. I know that *his thoughts as far as they relate to me, are thoughts of peace,* ‡ that he wills my salvation as he does that of all men, that he has accepted the satisfactions of Jesus Christ for me, as well as for all

\* Mich. iv. 12. † Rom. xi. 34. ‡ Jerem. xxix. 11.

men. But I also know that if I abuse his graces, his sanctity is incompatible with my revolts, and that he has chastisements in store for me proportioned to this neglected and outraged sanctity. Behold in what manner, and how far the thoughts of God are known to me. To judge of mine, becomes my immediate duty.

The Lord has said to me that I ought *to be holy because he is holy* ;\* consequently my thoughts ought to be holy, since his are of perfect sanctity. But it is in this respect I cannot sufficiently humble and confound myself; for my thoughts are almost in continual disorder. Thoughts of pride and vanity, I every instant forget my misery, and always imagine that I possess talents and perfections which do not really belong to me. I am surprised that all men do not unite in esteeming and praising me. Thoughts of ambition; I form a thousand chimerical projects of being superior to others, of

\* Levit. xxi. 8.

even ruling others ; I cherish the hope of being raised to the first stations, because I place no limits to my desires ; in a word, I wish to be something, although in reality I merit nothing but contempt and neglect. Thoughts of impurity and sensuality ; every object that presents itself, attracts my senses, seduces my imagination, invades my heart, pursues me even into my retreat, and destroys the tranquillity of my soul. Thoughts of intolerance with regard to others ; everything wounds me in their conduct and discourse. I do not perceive that it is great charity alone, which induces those persons to bear with my defects, or maintain any intercourse with me. Thoughts of attachment to the trifles I possess, and of cupidity for those I do not. I wish to acquire them, not for the purpose of providing for the wants of my condition, but in order to know that I am able to procure them, that I am free to bestow them, that I may triumph over others whose means are smaller, and

whose resources are more limited. By this conduct I flatter two passions,—avarice and vanity. I support one by the other, and am the victim of both. Thoughts of ill temper and humour; I am indignant if attention be not paid me, if I be contradicted, if my opinions do not influence the minds of others. I abandon myself to dejection, if I be not able to overcome those who contradict me, I become discouraged, which is a certain proof of my disappointed pride. Thoughts, foolish, frivolous, and fleeting; I am wandering in all places, at all times, and in all circumstances. I am filled with chimeras, although it would be my interest to reflect on serious subjects. I bring those phantoms even into the sanctuary of prayer and I profane this holy exercise, not so much by the tepidity of my soul, as by the activity of my imagination. Indulging in the desire of a long life, I pierce through future times, as if I were to be a witness of what will then take place, and I form

arrangements for a future which neither can nor will exist for me. Thoughts of inconstancy and perpetual wavering; I vary my projects for no other reason but because I cannot be of the same mind for two successive minutes. Thoughts of dangerous or illusory friendships; I occupy myself with old and new connexions, without regarding either the indifference of persons towards me, or the trouble with which the remembrance of it is attended, or the injury which they may cause to my salvation; I never suspect myself of treacherous egotism, which is always the soul of false friendship, as it is the destruction of true. Thoughts of increasing in light and knowledge; I embrace in my imagination all sciences, without hoping to acquire any, and without regarding their inutility, even should I acquire all. Thoughts against faith, against hope, against the love of God, and my neighbour; I find myself in a sort of irreligion, in a sphere of incredulity, in a chaos of absurdities. O holy

God! I am like those impious men who drew down thy first scourges on the earth, *because all their thoughts were prone to evil. My heart deviseth detestable thoughts, and these thoughts are an abomination to thee.* And how can they be holy, since they separate me from thee? Ah, Lord, create in me, then, a new heart, for I know the wickedness of my thoughts arises from the inveterate corruption of my heart; give me thy *holy spirit, thy principal spirit*, that I may begin to think like a sage, and a Christian.\*

### THIRD REFLECTION.

GOD, HOLY IN HIS WORKS; I, A SINNER IN ALL MY ACTIONS.

THE Prophet says that *God is holy in all his works.*† He is holy in the end of his works, and in the means of attaining this end. The end of his works is his own glory, and all the beings which he has

\* Ps. l. 12, 13, 14.

† Ps. cxliv. 17.

created and disposed in reference to this end, are the means of obtaining this glory. When he created the universe, he declared that each of his works *was good and very good*.\* This approbation was intended for our instruction, and not as a proof of any knowledge which he had acquired. He had operated after his own eternal ideas, and he knew all beings before any of them had proceeded out of nothing. All was *good and very good* in this first epoch of the world, because all bore the character of the sanctity of God. All was holy, because, according to the idea which the Scripture gives us of holiness, everything was from God alone, to God alone, for God alone, and could not subsist but under the protection of God alone. Thus all these great works were furnished and consecrated as an eternal monument of the sanctity of God. The seventh day was blessed and *sanctified*; that is, it was distinguished from all the other days, it

\* Genes. i. 31.

was *set apart*, according to the proper signification of the word *sanctified*, and destined to recal for ever the remembrance of the sanctity of the Creator. How sublime, O Lord, is this idea ! how it ravishes and transports me !

But what a contrast in sin ! This monster has entered into the world and produced therein the strangest revolutions. It has infected with its breath all the principles of sanctity ; it has spread dark vapors over the brilliancy of sanctity, and established the throne of Satan on the ruins of holiness. Ah, Lord ! has thy sanctity then disappeared from all the world ? can we no longer recognise thee in this world as the God of sanctity ? Quite the contrary, O my God ! Never did thy sanctity appear more brilliant than since the fall of man. Thou didst establish in his favour an order of mercy which could be nothing but the master-piece of a Being infinitely holy. To the world lost by sin, thou didst promise Him who was to be the



*Holy One*, by excellence. Man has been replaced in the path of sanctity which he had abandoned. The physical evils which were spread through all generations have become the means of sanctity. Moral evil, sin, has been proscribed as incompatible with holiness, and is left to the power of free will that it may attack and subdue it with the arms of sanctity. Lord! we are blind when we do not recognise thy sanctity in the universe even as it exists; and we are ungrateful when we do not adore it, in the order of redemption which thou hast established. It is principally in Jesus Christ and by Jesus Christ that thou appearest holy in all thy works. Thou hast renewed the world by thy holy Spirit, whom Jesus Christ has sent. Thou hast prepared for us *a new earth and a new heaven*,\* where Jesus Christ will permit us to *reign*† with him and his saints. Thou hast chosen us from the beginning of the

\* Apoc. xxi. 1.

† 1 Lid. xxii. 5.

*world to be holy and without spot in Jesus Christ and before thy eyes.\**

But what am I in this beautiful plan of holiness, in thy religion that is entirely holy, in thy Church, the mother of saints? I am a sinner: either because I have abandoned the end to which thou didst call me, which is sanctity, or because I have abused the means of attaining to sanctity, which thou didst offer me. I am a sinner, O my God, in all the periods of my life, in my infancy, in my youth, in my manhood, in my old age. I am a sinner in all the employments which thou didst confer on me, in all the relations I have had with the world. I am a sinner because I have transgressed all thy divine laws, because I am a slave to pride, to anger, to impurity, to avarice, to jealousy, to sensuality, to sloth; because I have neither strength in temptations, nor prudence in actions, nor temperance in the necessary relief of bodily wants, nor jus-

\* Ephes. i. 4.

tice in my dealings with my neighbour. I am a sinner in the use of all my senses ; I have profaned them by passionate looks, by dangerous companies, by malignant discourses, by shameful sensualities, by inconsiderate proceedings. I am a sinner by the abuse of time, by useless or dangerous reading, by arbitrary occupations, by indecent curiosity. I am a sinner in the very exercises of piety itself ; vanity, hypocrisy, tepidity and human respect destroy in my soul those seeds of holiness ; and how many graces have I not neglected, how many interior inspirations have I not resisted, how many lights have I not extinguished, how many excellent advices have I not despised, how many just and salutary reprimands have I not censured, how many virtuous examples have I not condemned, how many works of charity and mercy have I not failed to perform ! I am a sinner in health and in sickness, in abundance and in want, in success and in adversity, in the repose of a fixed dwell-

ing, and in the agitation of journeys, in strange houses and in my own habitation. I am a sinner towards my neighbours and friends, my benefactors, and those who wish me evil, my superiors and my equals. I am a sinner at prayer and meditation, at labour and repose;—a sinner, O my God, with regard to every object that is presented to me in the course of my life. Ah! I am like that unhappy person of whom the wise man speaks—*Iniquity has seized me, and I am entirely in the chains of sin.\**

Nevertheless, I belong to a holy God; my Redeemer and Model is holy; I am united in the communion of saints; I bear, in the language of the Apostle, no other name but that of *saint*; I have a body which is the temple of the Spirit of Holiness, I am destined to reign one day with the saints. Everything in me is holy, and yet everything is sinful. Through thy choice and thy mercy, O Lord! everything

is holy; and everything is sinful through my obstinacy, my insensibility, my continual revolts. O what a contrast! what an opposition! O my God, make this monstrous absurdity cease, in order that my holiness may be undivided, pure, and unvariable. Thou art a God of holiness, and thou art always holy—may I be *clothed with the new man who has been created to thy likeness in true justice and sanctity!*\*

#### FOURTH REFLECTION.

GOD, HOLY IN HIS WORD; I, A SINNER IN MY  
CONVERSATION.

God is called in the Apocalypse, the *holy and the true*:† two august names which fill me at this moment with a religious awe. I should be tempted to renounce all society, and to bury myself in the desert, in order to contemplate thee, O my God, under those two relations of *holiness and truth*. But where shall I find those two

\* Ephes. iv. 24.

† Apoc. iii. 7; vi. 10.

great perfections, except in thee, O Lord? Thou art *the Holy* and *the True*, because thou art the source of all *holiness* and *truth*. Thou art holy in thy *truth*, and true in thy *holiness*. What shall become of me in the world if I do not contemplate thy holiness and truth, if I do not learn that thy word is entirely *holy*, and that thy *holiness* is entire in thy word, which is thy divine eternal Word? ~~This~~ divine Word is thy great word, thy substantial word; it is manifested to the world, it is given to me in the eucharist, it is present to my spirit when I think of truth. for it is the divine *Word that enlighteneth every man coming into the world.*\* But my God, the language of this divine Word, that is, its doctrine, is also in thy holy Scriptures, the only monuments of an infallible truth, of a truth which never varies, but which incessantly condemns the world and its false maxims. This truth, written in imperishable characters, is the object of my present

\* John i. 9.

consideration, in order that I may comprehend how Thou art holy in thy written truth, and how I am profane and contemptible in my written and spoken falsehoods. Nevertheless, O Lord, how can I proceed in this meditation? At the very sight of thy sacred Scriptures, my spirit, dazzled by so great a majesty, is troubled and confused, my soul falls into dejection, all my powers lose their activity. Ah! I prostrate myself like the people of Israel, when they beheld the Book of the Law in the hand of Esdras.\* I say to myself—here then is a collection of the sayings of my God, of his divine oracles, of his holy ordinances, of his consoling promises; from hence proceed the words of life and holiness. What an abundance of truths!

I find here the true history of the world, the true series of generations, the perpetuity of the true religion, the ceremonies of true worship, the mission of true prophets, the true principles of morals, the

\* Esdras viii. 6.

examples of true virtue, the true foundations of my faith, the true grounds of my hope, the true motives of my love, the true repose of my soul, the true remedy against the fear of death, the true and the only goods which can satisfy my desires. I here behold Jesus Christ, the centre of all, the expounder of all, foreseeing all, and attracting all. He is promised in the beginning of the first book of Moses, and he is invoked at the end of the Apocalypse of the beloved disciple—thus verifying what he had said of himself, *I am the alpha and the omega, the first letter and the last, the beginning and the end.\** He is the link of the two Testaments: he was prefigured and promised throughout the Old, manifested and acknowledged throughout the New; he was desired and expected by all the prophets, seen and heard by all the apostles. O God! what a present hast thou given to men in bestowing them thy holy Scriptures! What could they behold

\* Apoc. i. 8.



without the light of this torch? What would they know without this treasure of knowledge? Whither could they go, without this infallible guide? Ah! now I understand more than ever the true notion of holiness, which this divine volume affords me. Thy Scriptures, O Lord, are holy, for they have never been corrupted by the spirit of falsehood that has so often seduced men, because they are free from all the fables which disgrace the history of mankind; because they form a body of instructions, predictions, and miracles, which human imagination in all its subtlety could never have invented; because they contain treasures of grace and consolation, which all the adversities and revolutions of the world cannot disturb, because they announce mysteries which all the systems of philosophy can never explain; because they promise blessings which the senses can never appreciate, which are not limited by time, nor exhausted by desire. O holy God! when

thou didst appear to Moses in the burning bush, thou didst tell him not to approach, but to take off his shoes, *because the ground was holy.*\* At the sight of the holy Scriptures, I apply these words to myself. I ought not to approach them but with a religious fear. I ought not to read them but with sentiments of the most profound veneration. Woe be to me if I have ever profaned this Divine Book, if I have studied it from motives of curiosity or vanity, if I have neglected it in order to indulge myself in useless reading. May this volume, so holy and venerable, be my consolation during life; and when it shall please thee to call me out of life, may it be still near the bed of my suffering, and may I die in the company of thy holy cross, and thy two holy Testaments! When thy adorable body shall have strengthened me against the dangers of this terrible passage, may some charitable friend still recal to my mind the words of thy holy

\* Exod. iii. 15.

prophets and apostles, and those of Jesus Christ himself, who is the beginning and the end of all thy Scriptures !

But, great God ! thou art holy in thy word, and I am a sinner in almost my entire conversation. The apostle St. James says, that *the tongue is an assemblage of all iniquities, that it places fire through the whole course of our life, that it inflames with the fire of hell, and fills with a mortal poison.*\* I behold myself in this frightful picture : my tongue has spread its venom through all the circumstances of my life. I have never known how to restrain it, even from so many detractions and murmurings, so much false confidence, duplicity, and impatience, so many indecencies, puerilities and insulting expressions, so many rude and unpolite answers, so many insidious and impertinent questions, so many base and servile flatteries, so many rash judgments and decisions, so many useless and injurious conversations. The

\* James iii. 6, 8.

same apostle says, that *it is easier to tame the most ferocious animals than to repress the tongue.*\* I am fully convinced of this profound truth. I reproach myself a thousand times for the disorderly and intemperate language that has fallen from my tongue. I have bewailed before God this perverse inclination. I have formed numberless resolutions on this point, and yet my good desires have been frustrated by frequent relapses. I have now reached an age at which wisdom and experience should guide my words, and yet I am the same that I was in my youth. My love of pleasure decays, my ambition is weakened, the enchantment of the world is disappearing, even my very vanity yields to the necessity of my being nothing in the eyes of the world, but my tongue still retains the empire it has usurped over my weak, inconsiderate, malicious and ungodly spirit. It resists the exercises of piety, the mortifications of the body, the princi-

\* Id. 7.

ples of reformation which I have made in retirement. What do I say? Retirement often fills it with more venom. The solitary left to himself becomes austere, caustic, censorious, and querulous. He affects to read lessons to mankind, and exclaims against anything that differs from his notions of pretended justice. Ah! with what reason did not the same apostle say, that *he who offends not in words is a perfect man!*\* In examining the conduct of men whose virtue is commended, see *if there be no sin in their words*, and if you find them blameless on this point, you may conclude with a moral certainty that they are true friends of God. How do I then appear in this point, O Lord! and what judgment dost thou pronounce upon me? My tongue is *a two-edged sword*,† like that of the wicked men whom the Prophet describes *My mouth is full of gall and bitterness; the poison of asps is under my lips.*‡

\* James iii. 2.

† Ps. lvi. 5.

‡ Ps. xiii. 3.

God of sanctity ! teach me the great art of silence which one of thy saints calls “the inspector of thoughts, the preserver of the love of God, of tears and of compunctions, the vigilant monitor that recalls our thoughts to the remembrance of death and of thy terrible judgments, the assured guide in the way of prayer and contemplation, the rapid chariot which transports the just soul even to the foot of thy throne.\*”

### FIFTH REFLECTION.

GOD, HOLY IN THE WORSHIP HE REQUIRES ; I, A  
SINNER IN EVERY PART OF THIS WORSHIP.

THE sanctity of God is fully and particularly displayed in the entire economy of religion. He has established a Church, one of whose characters is holiness. He has bequeathed to this Church his holy

\* St. John Climacus.

Ladder of Paradise. Step. xi.

Gospel. He has instituted sacraments whose peculiar and special effect is the sanctification of souls. He has diffused the knowledge of his name, by men whose sanctity obtained the crown of martyrdom. He wished that the faithful should form themselves into a society of saints. He has preserved for generations and generations the deposit of a morality altogether holy. He has banished from his flock those sects who changed the sanctity of his doctrine. He has perpetuated a succession of saints, and even confirmed their sanctity by miracles. He has opened asylums from age to age for those who are called to the most high sanctity. He speaks to the eyes of the simple faithful by all the symbols of holiness, by the cross of Jesus Christ, by the images and relics of the saints, by the ceremonies of religion. There is nothing in the Catholic Church which does not invite to sanctity; her temples, her public prayers, the administration of the sacraments, the burial of

the dead, the chaunting of the psalms, the sacred vestments, the pomp of great festivals, everything is marked with the seal of sanctity, although I here recount but a small portion of all that constitutes and adorns this holy worship. I acknowledge all these characters of sanctity, and nevertheless I am a sinner, O my God, and even this adds to my ingratitude towards thee. What love have I felt for religion and the Church whose child I am by holy Baptism? What are my dispositions in receiving the sacraments? With what respect have I approached the holy Altar, and assisted at, or celebrated the holy sacrifice? What testimony has been rendered to the doctrine of the Gospel by the holiness of my life? What impression have the examples of thy saints made upon me? What has been my punctuality in discharging all the exterior duties of my religion, and how have I entered into myself in order to enliven all those external appearances by a worship *in spirit and in truth*? O



Lord, if I enter more into detail on all these points, I fear that I have dishonoured thy holy temple by my indecencies, that I have profaned holy days by worldly occupations, that I have culpably neglected to attend in the assemblies of the faithful, that human respect or curiosity has conducted me to thy holy solemnities, that I have been a rock of scandal to my brethren, in turning them away from their duties, or giving them an example of criminal dissipation. It is enough, O Lord—this picture affrights me, and fills me with terror. What can I do at the conclusion of this exercise, but prostrate myself like Daniel in thy presence, and make thee, like him, a confession of my iniquities?\*

Ah! I have sinned against thee, holy and terrible God! I have strayed away from thee and thy holy commandments. I have not obeyed those who published to me thy holy will. Thou art just, O Lord, and confusion is my only

\* Dan. ix. 3, &c.

portion. I have merited all the scourges of thy wrath, because I have not kept thy holy law nor meditated upon thy truth. But nevertheless listen this day to the prayer of thy servant, look upon me from the throne of thy sanctity. Remember that I am marked with the seal of thy covenant, and that thy holy name has been invoked upon me.

## SEVENTH MEDITATION.

GOD, TERRIBLE IN HIS JUDGMENTS ; I, WORTHY  
OF HIS WRATH AND HIS VENGEANCE.

*Thou art terrible, and who shall resist thee ?*

Psalm lxxv. 8.

THE disorder and misfortunes of men, spring from two causes: the first is, that a great number of them are not persuaded of the existence of a future life—the second, that those who are convinced of this truth never think of the account they shall have to render the Sovereign Judge

of the actions of the present. The former are incredulous or libertines; the latter are men without reflection, or persons so occupied by the affairs of the world as to allow themselves no time to consider the judgment which must follow the very moment of their death. It would be necessary to prove to the incredulous the truth of a life to come and the dogma of eternity; but this is not the object of the present exercise; and moreover, through the divine mercy, I do not belong to the number of those pretended philosophers who limit their existence to the duration of this life. It is necessary to awaken in the second class of whom I spoke, the remembrance of God's judgment. Now this matter concerns me, because the faith of the judgment of God is unfruitful in me, because I am satisfied in believing this important truth in a speculative manner, without deducing from it those consequences which are inseparably annexed to the interests of my salvation. The sub-

ject, therefore, of my present consideration, is *God who is to judge ; I who am to be judged*,—and I will thence conclude that I am absolutely bound to reform the whole tenor of my life.

Pierce me, O Lord, this day with the fear of thy judgments, in order that at the terrible moment when I shall appear before thee, I may not be without confidence ; that I may be able to present thee a soul which has been long exercised in fearing thy vengeance. . This fear is the beginning of wisdom, and wisdom leads to thy love. I desire to fear thee, in order to love thee, and I wish to love thee, that I may fear thee—two sentiments which ought to be the foundation, and rule, of my entire conduct.

## FIRST REFLECTION.

## GOD WILL JUDGE ME.

*Jesus Christ will render to every man according to his works.\**

THIS truth is declared, or supposed, in all the books, and in every page of the New Testament. It is evident, that on earth Jesus Christ does not render to every man according to his works. The impious are often prosperous, whilst the just are in tribulation. There ought therefore to be a time when the divine oracle would be accomplished, when Jesus Christ would discharge the functions of a judge, and this should be the moment that immediately follows death. Then the career of man is at an end; time, which had been given him to work out his salvation, is over; the steward, of whom the Gospel speaks, is summoned at the close of his stewardship, to render an account of what had been entrusted to his care; night

\* Math xvi. 27. Rom. ii. 6. Apoc. xxii. 12.

coming on, the virgins are admonished to prepare themselves to go meet the bridegroom; harvest time being arrived, the father of the family tells his domestics to separate the chaff from the good grain; the man who has returned from a long journey, demands an account of the talents which he had placed in the hands of his servants. The object of all these figures is to give us to understand, that after we leave this world, we must appear before the supreme arbiter of our destiny, in order to be examined, interrogated and judged on the use we have made of our time, and on the actions which have filled up our days and our years. There will be, at the end of time, a universal judgment, at which the whole world must appear, that the great designs of God may be made manifest, and that the reward of the just and the punishment of the wicked may become public and solemn; but, before this period, every man who leaves the world ought to be in a condition pro-

portioned to the good or the evil which he has done, and this condition is allotted him by the definitive sentence of the sovereign judge. "The last day of your life," says St. Augustine, "is for you the last day of the world, because your sentence at the general judgment will be but a repetition of that passed upon you at the particular one."\* Lazarus, on leaving this world, was carried into the bosom of Abraham; and the rich glutton, after his death, was buried in hell; and this undoubtedly happened to each, in consequence of the judgment which God had pronounced upon their actions. There is no medium, no interval between those two great events, death and judgment; the one immediately follows the other. According to the calculations of observing men, fifty thousand persons die every day on the globe which we inhabit. If this be the case, fifty thousand souls are daily presented and judged before the tribunal of God.

\* Sermon clxii.

O my God ! men do not meditate on this great truth. They behold every day their fellow men passing into eternity, and they never think of thy judgment which is to meet them at their entrance. They know that the man who dies, belongs not to the world, no more than if it had been extinguished with him ; but they do not reflect that this dying man passes into another world, where he must take the station that shall be allotted him by thy judgment. They often pronounce an eulogy upon him that is no more, but they forget that thou, the Sovereign Judge, art guided in thy decisions by rules different from those of the world, that thy lights are infinitely superior to those of the world, and that he who is irreproachable before a worldly tribunal, is frequently an object of horror and malediction in thy sight. It is right, O Lord, that thou shouldst judge, and thou dost, in reality, judge every moment the crowd of individuals who make their exit from the stage of the world. I profoundly



adore thy sovereign justice. I prostrate myself at the foot of thy dread tribunal. I acknowledge with all thy angels and saints that the divine *Lamb* that was immolated for us, *is worthy to open the book*\*—the eternal book in which all the actions of men are written, that they may be submitted to thy infallible judgment.

## SECOND REFLECTION.

### I AM TO BE JUDGED.

WHEN the terrible truth of God's judgment is preached to us, or when we read of it in holy books, we generally consider others under this respect. We fancy them present at the tribunal of God, rendering an account of their life, awaiting the decision of their lot, and receiving the reward or the punishment of their actions. Very rarely do we say to ourselves, this truth concerns me, it is for me it is announced, for me it is written. If all other men

\* Apoc. v. 9.

were to be judged and rewarded at this moment, of what use would it be to me if I am to be one day condemned? And if they be all condemned, what injury can it do me if I be acquitted? It is therefore I, and I alone, who ought to appropriate the application of this event. Instead of planning chimerical schemes of fortune, of long life, of success in my affairs, of brilliant exploits of worldly applause, I should say to myself, in the secret of my heart, there is a Sovereign Judge who registers all my actions and who will exhibit them to me in detail; there is a moment when I shall appear alone, without support, without recommendation, without friends, at the feet of the eternal Master whom I ought to serve, love and glorify, and who will interrogate and judge me upon those points alone. What will then be my feelings? What can I then produce for my justification? The list of my days will be long; the events of my life may be numerous; the labours which will

consume my strength, may perhaps exceed those of many others in the same state of life : but when all shall be put into the scales of eternity, will it not resemble the life of that unhappy king of Babylon who was *found light in the balance* before the Lord?\*

I dread the judgments of men. Whether true or false, they are intolerable to me. The principle which declares the necessity of a good character, is in my eyes the foundation of my existence in society; I urge it to an almost illimitable extent. It is on this account I am so easily provoked against the injustice of those who injure me without cause. I fancy that no reparation is sufficient for this treatment. I try a hundred different methods to place my innocence in a clear point of view, and if it should happen that the influence of my opponents would defeat my speculations, I fall into a kind of despair; I flee the commerce of men; I

\* Daniel v. 27.

renounce all the charms of society. Judgments of men which still more sensibly afflict me when I am led either by imprudence or passion into some ridiculous or hateful undertaking. As far as I possibly can, I conceal this folly from those who might reproach me. Even should they be ignorant of my conduct, the least word or action on their part will cause me to suspect that they know it; everything conspires in some measure against my conscience—everything seems to bear witness against me, and I fancy I am disgraced, because I have merited dishonour. O how strong a proof of self-love, which is as unjust as it is refined! In my rational moments, or whilst engaged at prayer, I reproach myself with a hundred mistakes, a hundred frauds, a hundred prevarications against the law of God, against the duties which I owe to my neighbour and myself. Humbling though this spectacle is, it causes me no extreme grief: I am even sometimes flattered in

acknowledging those truths. But if another witnessed the sort of justice with which I treat myself, or if he presumed to exercise it in my stead,—if he even reproached me but for the thousandth part of what is reprehensible in me, my soul would be seized with a mortal grief.

Now why does this fear which I have of the judgment of men, forsake me when I think of the judgment of God? Why does not this self-love that is so jealous of what I call honour, display itself, when I reflect, that at the moment of my death I shall fall into the hands of a Judge who is infinitely more to be dreaded than if all the generations of men taken together, had conspired against me? This Judge possesses three qualities to which men can lay no claim. He knows everything—he searches everything—he punishes everything. His lights, his exactness, his power are without limit. We may escape the judgment of men in a thousand different ways. Secrecy and darkness bid de-

fiance to their vigilance, address and cunning defeat their research, interest and power prevail against their authority. But, *O Lord*, said the Prophet, *whither shall I go to avoid thy presence, where shall I conceal myself to escape thy research? Thou searchest the bottom of the heart, thou dost expose all its foldings: all power belongs to thee, and who can comprehend the extent of that power when thou exercisest thy wrath?\** Ah! Sovereign Judge of the living and the dead, thou alone art terrible. Thou alone shouldst be conjured, without ceasing, *not to enter into judgment with thy servant, for no man will be justified in thy sight.†* Why should I fear the judgment of men? They may humble and degrade me—they may deprive me of the advantages of society, of my property, and perhaps of my life. But thou, O God of terror! thou canst by thy judgment *condemn my body and my soul to eternal torments.‡*

\* Psalms Passim.

† Psalm cxl. 11, 2.

‡ Matt. x. 28.

Let men therefore judge me as they please ; let them conceive whatever opinions their caprice or their prejudices will suggest to them concerning me. *It is a thing to which I am indifferent*, said the great Apostle.\* But thou, O Lord ! thou who judgest in truth, and in vigorous justice, do thou afford me those means of salvation, which will support my confidence during this life, and particularly at the decisive moment of my passage into eternity.

### THIRD REFLECTION.

CONSEQUENCES OF THESE TWO TRUTHS ; GOD  
WILL JUDGE ME, AND, I AM TO BE JUDGED.

THERE is no necessity here of entering into any lengthened reasoning. If God shall be my judge at the moment of death, behold the resolutions which I ought to make.

1. To cast my eyes over the whole of

\* 1 Cor. iv. 3.

my past life, and there to discover matter for a terrible judgment. I have sinned, O Lord, I have exposed in thy presence a part of my crimes. I have not known them all. Thou alone knowest their number, and canst estimate their malice. May they be to me a perpetual source of tears, and may thy mercy preserve in me a spirit of compunction! *Spare, O Lord! spare thy servant,\** and permit not my soul, which is the price of thy precious blood, to fall any more into the hands of its cruel enemies—sin and the devil.

2. To judge myself with rigour. This is the advice which the Apostle gives: *If we judge ourselves, we will not be judged.†* May I therefore, O my God, be on my guard for the future, against the artifices of self-love, against all the principles which serve to flatter my inclinations, excuse my sloth, or widen the way which leads to life. A diffidence in myself should be joined to a confidence in thee. I ex-

\* Joel ii. 17.

† 1 Cor. xi. 31.



pect everything from thee, O Lord, and from myself I expect nothing but those wicked fruits whose germ is so ancient in my soul. Like Job, *I fear all my works*,\* because there is nothing in them worthy of thy just regards. Increase in me this fear, but allay it, O my divine Master, by the unction of thy love.

3. Never to judge others. *Who art thou that judgest thy brother?*† says the Apostle. O my God, on the day of thy wrath *every one will bear his own burthen.*‡ The actions of others will concern themselves alone, as mine will concern only me. If I judge others, I usurp thy rights, for to thee alone, O Lord, belong judgment and justice. Besides, who has enabled me to discover the intentions of my fellow-creatures? Who has declared to me those secrets of man which thy spirit alone can penetrate? O what an error of the human spirit and the human heart! Am I

\* Job ix. 28.

† Rom. xiv. 4.

‡ Gal. vi. 5.

not sufficiently culpable myself without being burthened by the iniquities of others? O divine oracle—*Judge not, and thou shalt not be judged,\** may I never lose sight of thee! Restrain my spirit, moderate my tongue, incessantly remind me that I am never a judge, but always a criminal.

4. To place myself frequently in spirit on the bed of death, at that last moment, when my soul, according to the expression of Saint Ambrose, *will behold a great spectacle,†* since it will be presented instantaneously before the throne of God in order to be judged—the sole and only spectacle, O my soul, which is worthy of thy attention. The heavens, the earth, generations, empires, all will vanish like a dream. God alone,—and thou alone. God alone, and his justice—thou alone, and thy works. God alone, and his eternity—thou alone, and thy immortality. God alone, and everything in him—thou

\* Matt. vii. 1.

† Enarr. in Ps. xxxvi.

alone, and nothing more but thee. Meditate frequently on these truths, and from them learn how to regulate thy thoughts, thy words, and thy actions.

THE END.













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